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SHORT SERMONS

BY

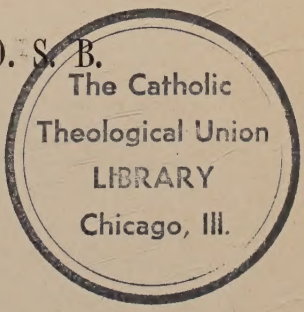
REV. FRANCIS HUNOLT, S. J.

Translated, modernized, condensed, arranged and adapted

BY

REV. AUGUSTINE WIRTH, O. S. B.

WITHDRAWN



VOL. II.

THE PENITENT CHRISTIAN.

PUBLISHED BY REV. AUGUSTINE WIRTH, O. S. B.
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REV AUGUSTINE WIRTH, O. S. B.
ELIZABETH, N. J.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

PENITENTIAL WORKS.

"Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities: . . . but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. 13:13,14.

Our holy Mother, the Catholic Church, gives us a beautiful and salutary lesson in the words of to-day's Epistle, wherewith she instructs all her children how to prepare for the advent of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and future Judge. And what does she say? "It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep." Sinners, it is full time for you to awaken out of the deep sleep of sin by true penance. "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light." But when you have so far done penance that you are freed from the slavery of sin, and have regained the grace of God, what must you do then? "Let us walk honestly as in the day: not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ," that is, imitate the example of him who spared not himself in vigils, fasting, and sufferings; and, "make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscence." The true Christian must lead a penitential life, mortifying and crucifying his flesh. Why? Because he has sinned, and may sin again. And he who has sinned must do penance,

I. Because he owes it to God; and
II. Because he owes it to himself.

I. It is a grievous error of heretics, to condemn all works of penance and satisfaction. Luther and his followers say: True penance consists in the amendment of one's life; there is no need of contrition or works of penance. Christ has already fully atoned

for all our sins, by offering to his eternal Father the inexhaustible treasure of his precious Blood, so that we are not required to suffer the least punishment. To mortify and chastise ourselves for our sins is nothing else but to lessen and declare invalid the merits of Jesus Christ. Nay, provided we have but a firm faith in the sufferings and death of Christ, the Son of God, nothing else is needed.

This error has been long since condemned by the Catholic Church, especially in the Council of Trent. All the Fathers and Doctors of the Church are opposed to this error, since they all exhort us, by voice and pen, to do penance. A sinner, says Tertullian in the first Christian century, is one who lives on earth in order to do penance. St. Augustine says that there are three kinds of tribunals, in which God judges in different ways. First, that of his mercy and goodness which is in the Sacrament of Baptism ; second, that of his justice, which will be unmitigated in the general judgment ; and third, that of both justice and mercy, in the holy Sacrament of Penance, wherein, in consideration of the infinite merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, he forgives the guilt of sin completely and forever, but reserves some temporal punishment which must be suffered by the penitent in atonement for his sins.

This is but right. If I offend a man like myself, and injure him in his property, his honor or his good name, not only must I humbly and contritely acknowledge my sin, beg the man's pardon and promise that I will never offend him again, but I must repair the injury I have done his honor or his property, even at great cost to myself. So with earthly tribunals. If the Governor graciously pardons a malefactor condemned to death, he does not set him free without punishment: his sentence is commuted either to imprisonment for life, or for a term of years. Sinner, your life was spared, when you humbly confessed your sins and received sacramental absolution, so that you ought to be eternally grateful for the benefit bestowed on you. But gratitude is not enough ; you must make reparation to the injured honor of God; you must

satisfy the divine justice for the punishment that still remains due to your sins, either by bearing patiently the crosses and trials that God sends you, or by voluntary penances and mortifications in this life, or else you will have to suffer long and indescribable pains in purgatory.

Even Adam and Eve saw the justice of this when the first sin was committed. When they tried to cover their nakedness, they made for themselves a garment out of leaves, the leaves of the fig-tree: "They sewed together fig-leaves, and made themselves aprons" (Gen. 3 : 7). Why did they choose fig-leaves, which are hard and rough, and are more apt to torment the body than to clothe it? It was precisely because they were rough, that our first parents chose them, in order thereby to show that he who has sinned, and has lost the grace of God, must wear a garment of penance, no matter how it is fashioned. . . and they would have always worn this penitential garment, if God, in his mercy, had not made for them garments of skins, instead of the fig-leaves.

David had sinned grievously, and repented of his sin so thoroughly and with so much contrition, that the prophet Nathan, in the name of the Lord, assured him of forgiveness. "Nevertheless," he added, "because thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, for this thing, the child that is born to thee shall surely die"(2 Kings 12 : 14). Famine, war, persecution, and other plagues shall come upon thee. Was David satisfied with this penance enjoined on him by the prophet, after his confession? "I am ready for scourges," he sighs, "and my sorrow is continually before me" (Ps. 37: 18). His fasting was so severe that ashes were his food, and tears of contrition his drink. "I did eat ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping" (Ps. 101: 10).

Sinful Christian, you, too, have offended the great God; you have often and grievously during your life transgressed his commandments. Where is your penance for those sins? I have performed the penance enjoined on me by the priest. Eh? And what sort of a penance was it? I have said a few decades of the Ro-

sary, or some of the penitential psalms, or I have heard a Mass, or given a trifling alms to the poor, or have abstained from meat for one evening. Nothing more than that? Where are the voluntary mortifications and penances that should justly follow the performance of the slight penance enjoined on you? I know nothing about them; my confessor said nothing of them to me. Is that a sufficient reason for doing nothing more? The penance that, for good reasons and according to the merciful disposition of the Catholic Church, is now enjoined in such slight measure in the Sacrament of Penance, is a different thing from that which the sinner should voluntarily take on himself, in order to atone for the insult he has offered to God.

What would you think if I could represent to you the customs of the early Christians, the penitents, without regard to sex or condition, who had to prostrate themselves at the church door, allowing themselves to be trodden under foot by those who came in or went out, and imploring their prayers with tearful voice? What, you say, was the meaning of all this? That the sinner must punish himself, or be punished; that he who has gratified himself unlawfully, must deny himself lawful pleasures.

And we, who have committed, perhaps, more grievous sins, having fulfilled the penance enjoined by the confessor, are completely satisfied. We enjoy our sleep, we laugh and amuse ourselves, we eat and drink, and do what we please, just as if we had not committed any sin whatever. Fasting, bodily austerities, and hair-shirts are left to people who live in convents and monasteries. Such mortifications are good enough for great sinners like them, but not for us, who live in the world. We have no need of them. As if God had less claim on the children of the world on account of their sins, than on his own beloved servants. No, says St. Cyprian, speaking of all without exception, "the penance should not be less than the crime for which it is inflicted." Every mortal sin deserves eternal punishment, and it is only just that a life-long penance should follow it. Some will say: I know I am a sinner, and that I am bound to make satisfaction to God for the in-

sult I have offered him ; but I can manage that in another way, namely, by exciting myself to a deep sorrow when I think of my past sins, by often making an act of contrition, by gaining the indulgences granted by the Church, and by other meritorious good works. If I have recourse to means of that kind, I need not afflict my body. As long as sufficient atonement is made, it comes to the same thing in the end. Ah ! listen. Since the body has sinned as well as the soul, the body must also satisfy for sin by penance. This is a duty you owe not only to God, but also

II. *To yourself.*

Two men are caught in the act of robbery and murder and are brought before the judge. They are a master and his servant, companions in wickedness. After both have been tried, the master is sentenced to be broken on the wheel, while the servant is to be allowed to go scotfree. Ask even a child if this is just. Tell him moreover, that half or more than half the booty was given to the servant, who misled, tempted, or forced his master into the commission of the crime, yet he is set free while the master is executed. Who would not cry out against such injustice ! If the guilt of the one exceeds that of the other, so should his punishment also. And if any favor is to be shown to either, then the master should be acquitted while the wicked servant should be made to suffer for the crime. Now, whenever a mortal sin is committed, there robbery and murder both are committed. God is robbed of his honor and glory, and Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is again crucified. Who is guilty of this murder and theft ? The human soul ; for without its consent, no sin can be committed. But it is not alone in its wickedness ; generally speaking, it has a companion. The body with its outward senses must help accomplish the sinful action. The soul, while united to the body, cannot even conceive a single thought, unless it receives by the imagination, through the senses, the form wherewith to invest it. Sins of outward act are done by the body. So that both body and soul are caught in the very act of sin by the al-

mighty God, brought before his judgment-seat, and there declared worthy of punishment. Which of the two must be punished? Must the soul alone do penance and bewail its sins with bitter tears of sorrow? Is the body to go free altogether, and enjoy its usual comforts? Is that just? If the body has shared the guilt, why should the soul alone be condemned to suffer?

But perhaps the body can boast of a more noble descent than the soul? Sometimes in worldly tribunals a criminal is acquitted, or his punishment is lessened, on account of nobility or birth? Alas! no, the body is most miserable in its origin! a thing of dust and ashes. Without the soul it is nothing but a sink of corruption and the food of worms? The soul, on the contrary, is an immortal and beautiful spirit, created to the image and likeness of God; it is the lawful lord and master of the body, which must serve it as its obedient subject.

Now, which of the two has the greater share of the plunder, when sin is committed? Which has the greater pleasure in the sinful act? The master, or the servant? The body or the soul? Apart from the satisfaction arising from pride and vain honor, all vices procure for the body some sensual gratification or ward off from it something unpleasant and disagreeable. They aid it to enjoy itself, eat, drink, and sleep well, be well clad and comfortably housed, and have nothing to suffer, that eyes, ears, tongue, hands, taste, smell, and touch may have the delights they long for. In a word, it is, generally speaking, for the sake of the body and its senses that God is abandoned and despised, that the precious soul is ruined, and the joys of heaven forfeited, while the soul has the very least share of the advantage, and the greatest of the injury and malice resulting therefrom.

Finally, if the instigator of a robbery or murder has not the least claim to mercy, and deserves the severest punishment, how can the body be spared, when there is question of satisfying for sin? For it alone not only shows the soul how to sin, and gives it occasion thereto, but continually coaxes and impels it, forces it, so to say, to consent to its desires. "From whence are wars and

contentions among you?" asks St. James: "Are they not hence? from your concupiscences, which war in your members?" (Jas. 4: 1.) And St. Paul complains that: "The good which I will, I do not: but the evil which I will not, that I do. . . .For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is, in my members" (Rom. 7 : 19, 23).

This we know from our own sad experience. Although reason has received from God such authority over the body that the latter cannot open an eye, or move hand or foot, without the consent of the will, yet the flesh refuses obedience, and obstinately declines to hearken to the command of the reasoning will. The Saints themselves felt and bewailed the unceasing stings of concupiscence. St. Paul, that vessel of election, after having suffered many trials of this sort, sighs forth: "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

And yet, when the poor soul wearied out with the struggle, consents to sin, and the question arises as to who must atone for the injury offered to God, sentence is at once pronounced against the soul. By its contrition and sorrow, it is expected to make up for everything, while the reckless instigator of all the evil, the body, is allowed to rest and enjoy itself, seeking its comfort without the least restraint. Reason, where art thou? Is this right? No; the body should do penance also. And woe to us, if we allow it to go unpunished! The just God will not permit the flesh to be without its share of suffering. He can send a countless number of diseases, an unlimited number of misfortunes, innumerable crosses and trials, with which to contradict at pleasure the desires of the flesh; while death is always ready to do his bidding, snatching away husband, wife, child, or dear friend, and depriving life of all its joys and consolation.

Therefore, sinner, hasten to be on the safe side, and anticipate the divine punishments by voluntary mortifications. "You must either punish yourself," says St. Augustine, "or God will punish you."

Prudence teaches us to choose the lesser of two evils. A single slight but voluntary mortification of the senses, or of the appetites, is of more value in the sight of God, as an atonement for our sins, than severe punishments, suffered against our will.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

AN EASY AND LUXURIOUS LIFE.

"*What went you out to see? a man clothed in soft garments?*"
Matt. 9 : 8.

St. John Baptist, the holy precursor of Christ, is not a soft-living or effeminate man. Behold him, clad in a rough camel-skin, his body emaciated by constant fasting, as he goes about preaching the necessity of penance. Why all these evidences of a life of severe mortification? Was not the Baptist sanctified in his mother's womb? Was it not he whom Christ called an angel on account of his innocence? Never in his whole life did he commit the least sin, yet see how he puts our weakness and delicacy to shame: We have sinned often and grievously; nevertheless, we shun the least discomfort, and gratify our senses on every occasion. Can we in that way, gain heaven with St. John? No, Christians: "From the days of John the Baptist until now," says our Lord, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away," and to-day, I undertake to prove that an easy and luxurious life is not the way to heaven,

I. Because it is either a sinful life, or one which is full of the danger of sin; and

II. Because it is not a Christian life.

I. By a luxurious life I mean a constant seeking after bodily comforts and sensual gratifications; a perpetual flight and avoid-

ance of all that can cause pain to the body, or displease the outward senses, or contradict the natural inclinations. In this way, everything that is delicious is given to the mouth, the eyes are allowed to look at all that is pleasing, the ears to hear what is delightful, the taste to enjoy what is sweet, the body, to feel what is soft and comforting; while, on the other hand, if any of those things be wanting, if the natural will or inclination be contradicted, then there arises a feeling of vexation, annoyance, and discomfort, which makes one impatient, displeased, and discontented. The greater part of such a one's time is spent in eating, drinking, sleeping, dressing, visiting, and amusements; in a word, the votary of luxury is always seeking for pleasures and distractions, although the latter may not in themselves be unlawful. This is the life against which St. Paul warned the Christians of Rome: "Make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences" (Rom. 13: 14). Mark the words, "in its concupiscences," as if he wished to say: You must not even have a desire for the delights of the flesh. And yet, what a vast number there are now in the world, who thus make provision for the flesh!

Now, I say that a luxurious life of this kind is not the way to heaven, firstly, because it is either a sinful one, or, at all events, is exposed to the danger of sin. Otherwise, we discredit the teachings of the holy Fathers of the Church and doubt those of the Holy Scripture itself. St. Paul, in briefly detailing the vices most prevalent in the world, indicates inordinate self-love as their first and only cause, "Men shall be *lovers of themselves*," he writes to his disciple Timothy. There is the root;—and what other evils spring from it? They shall be: "Covetous, haughty, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, wicked, without affection, without peace, slanderers, incontinent, unmerciful, without kindness, traitors, stubborn, puffed up, and lovers of pleasure more than of God: having an appearance, indeed, of godliness, but denying the power thereof. . . . men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith, etc." (Tim. 3: 2, 3, 4, 5, 8).

But you may ask, is it, then, a sin to love one's self, to seek one's bodily comfort, and to gratify one's senses? And I am obliged to answer you: No, it is not a sin; but it is, generally speaking, the door to a whole catalogue of sins, nay, to an almost constant state of sin. Every pleasure, considered in itself, may be lawful and becoming; but to seek and desire one pleasure after the other, and to be inordinately addicted to sensual delights, cannot be anything else but a vicious life. "The wisdom of the flesh is death," says St. Paul; "The wisdom of the flesh, is an enemy to God: for it is not subject to the law of God; neither can it be. And they who are in the flesh, cannot please God"(Rom. 8: 6–8). Can one be sinless while the soul is in such a dangerous condition? Can one love God and please him, when one is his sworn enemy? What a bitter curse is uttered against voluptuaries in the Gospel of St. Luke! "Woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation ...Woe to you that are filled... Woe to you that now laugh" (Luke 6: 24,25) and have an easy life of it. Who speaks thus, my dear brethren. Jesus Christ himself, our Saviour, who is otherwise so good and gentle. Who can doubt what he says? Amongst all created things, sin alone, or the state of sin, can be the object of the divine malediction; so that, this easy, luxurious life, which Christ threatens with such grievous woes, cannot be an innocent life, or one free from all sin. On the contrary if you reflect but for a moment on its nature, qualities, and effects, you will see that it cannot but be vicious, or the occasion of many vices. If full liberty is given to the eyes, ears, tongue, and the other senses; if they are not often restrained by self-denial, must they not frequently meet with objects that are unlawful and dangerous to the soul? What is therefore, more necessary in this respect, than constant, daily mortification, of which those fastidious people do not wish to know anything? What a powerful influence over the reasoning will have not the corrupt inclinations and desires of the flesh, always impelling and, as it were, dragging us violently to evil! If we do not bravely resist them, can we remain long free from sin? But we cannot resist them without doing violence to

ourselves in many things, combating our evil desires, and practising mortification constantly.

No matter how innocent pleasures seem to be in the beginning, if one becomes inordinately attached to them, and gives himself up unrestrainedly to them, they take from him all relish for heavenly things. The precious time given him for the sole purpose of attending to the business of his salvation is, generally speaking, frittered away ; he has no desire for prayer, fasting, or visiting the church ; the duties of his state of life are neglected on account of the difficulties that attend their performance ; he seldom hears the word of God in sermons, if the hour appointed for the sermon be too early, or the weather too cold ; and meanwhile, for weeks and months, he neither hears, reads, or thinks of anything that could encourage him in the service of God. With regard to the fasting prescribed by the Church, since it is contrary to his bodily comfort, he finds all sorts of pretexts to dispense himself from it. The mind becomes indisposed for good works, the understanding darkened, the reason perverted, if the thoughts and faculties of the man are directed like the dumb brutes, to his mere temporal wants, and he whose desires should be in heaven, his future country, is no longer capable of any other knowledge than that of which St. James says that it is brutish and diabolical : "This is not wisdom descending from above, but earthly, sensual, devilish" (Jas. 3 : 15). He becomes the slave of his own body, to which he devotes all his cares and anxieties by day and by night ; nay, he sacrifices to it his whole life, thus placing his last end in those pleasures and enjoyments which, used in due order and moderation, should serve as a means of preserving his health in order the better to do the will of God and attend to his soul's welfare. When the patriarch Noe sent out the raven from the ark, why did it not return ? Would it not have been well off in the ark ? Yes, but it saw the carrion floating about, that was its ordinary food, and it fell upon it at once, and left Noe, who had hitherto cared for it. Even so is it, at last, with those slaves of their bodies. Once they have acquired a taste for earthly things, they

think no more of God, they forget the future life, and would not set much store by the happiness of heaven, if they could be sure of enjoying themselves forever here on earth. "The heavens of heavens is the Lord's," they would say; "but the earth he has given to the children of men" (Ps. 113 : 16).

See how dangerous and sinful an easy and luxurious life is! It is that broad and spacious way of which our Lord speaks with moaning and lamentation: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth," not to heaven, but "to destruction;" and, alas, "many there are who go in thereat" (Matt. 7 : 13). A luxurious life is not only a life tending to sin, but

II. It is not a Christian life.

No Christian can go to heaven who does not lead a true Christian life. Now, the heaven that we have to expect is not different from that which the first Christians worked for: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" (Matt. 11: 12). There is no other way but the old one which leadeth to this heaven: "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life; and few there are that find it!" (Ibid. 7: 14.) Jesus Christ still says to us, as he said to his followers of the first century: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter and shall not be able" (Luke. 13: 24). In holy Baptism, my brethren, we all took a solemn and public oath, to renounce the world and its pomps and vanities; the devil and his works; the flesh and its desires. Therefore Tertullian calls Christians, "Religious of the Cross;" and St. Paul says that baptism is a crucifixion, a death and burial of man. "For we are buried together with him by baptism in to death" (Rom. 6: 4), he writes to the Romans; so that we must henceforth live for Christ alone, and die to all the desires of corrupt nature, to the flesh and its sensualities. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer . . . . Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts

thereof"(Ibid.6: 12). Now,O luxurious man, how can you keep this baptismal promise and vow, if you always treat your body so delicately, seek its comfort in all things,gratify all its desires,and avoid crosses and discomforts as long as you can? No, in the life you lead, you are a perjured, unfaithful, unjust renegade, who have only the name of a Christian.

Further, what is a Christian? Do you think, perhaps, that the few drops of water that were poured on your head in Baptism alone suffice to make you one? No doubt, they are necessary, but they are not sufficient. What, then, is a true Christian? He is a man, says St. Bernard, whose chief and greatest business it is to follow Christ, to take him as his Model, and to regulate his life according to that of Christ. "In vain," says he :—"in vain, am I a Christian, if I do not follow Christ." "God became man," says St. John Chrysostom, "that man might become, as it were, God ; he made himself like to us, not merely to redeem us, but that we might lead a life like to his. 'For I have given you an example,' he says himself, by way of exhortation to all men, 'that as I have done to you, so you do also' " (John 3 : 15). In a word, it is an undoubted fact that we must become comformable to the image of the Son of God, if we wish to be amongst the number of those whom God has elected to eternal life, as St. Paul expressly says. Now, O voluptuary, compare your effeminate life with that of Jesus Christ, and behold the startling contrast! Christ, poor and stripped of all earthly things; you with your heart buried in the perishable goods of earth. Christ, torn in every part of his body with scourges ; you, in such comfort that the prick of a needle is intolerable to you. You will not hear of overcoming yourself unless there is question of gratifying your sensuality. Christ, a man of sorrows; you, a child of joys. Christ, under the cross, and on the cross even to death, while you dream of nothing but pleasures, and cannot bear even the name of adversity. Could two more inharmonious things be well brought together, than the life of Christ and yours? Oh, what a dangerous sign of eternal reprobation is this! When, on your death-bed, they

will place the crucifix in your hands, will it be a source of consolation, think you, or not, rather, a presage of your eternal damnation? The death of Christ is of no use to you, unless you endeavor to make your life resemble his. "And they that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences" (Gal. 5 : 24).

Finally, even if you had not renounced in Baptism the flesh and its concupiscences; even if Christ was not proposed to you as your Model; would you not still be obliged, as a Christian, to obey the Christian law? What is that law? Read the New Testament, and you will find that it inculcates nothing more frequently than self-denial, mortification, and the crucifying of one's self. For the sake of brevity, I will quote but a few passages from the lips of Christ himself: "Whosoever doth not carry his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14 : 27). "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal. If any man minister to me, let him follow me" (John. 12 : 25, 26). The Epistles of St. Paul are full of exhortations to the effect that the goods of this world must be enjoyed, even by those who possess them in abundance, with a constant moderation and spirit of detachment: "It remaineth," he writes to the Corinthians, "that they also who have wives be as if they had none. . . and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as if they used it not" (1 Cor. 7 : 29-31). Do you think that this is, perhaps, but an exhortation to a work of supererogation, and not a positive command? How can that be? Are we not commanded to follow Christ, in order to enter heaven with him? And we cannot follow him without bearing daily crosses, trials, and mortifications. If there is no command to deny one's self in this life, why does our Lord threaten with the loss of their souls those who neglect doing so? If we are not commanded to lead mortified lives, why does St. Paul exclude the effeminate from the kingdom of God? "Nor the effeminate shall possess the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6 : 10).

Most dangerous, then, not to say unhappy, is the state of those who live in abundance of all temporal goods, who have everything they desire, and use all they have for their bodily comfort and for the gratification of their senses. They have just reason for fearing that they are of the number of those whom Christ threatens with woe, because they have their consolation here; of those who tread that broad and pleasant way that leads to destruction and eternal ruin. They have reason to fear that, one day, will be spoken of them the words of the Apocalypse: "As much as she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give ye to her" (Apoc. 18 : 7), unless they begin at once to practise mortification of the body and its senses.

Rejoice, on the other hand, you poor and needy mortals, who suffer want in many things, who have to labor hard for your daily bread, whose flesh is tamed by weakness and illness, by trials and troubles of all kinds, be comforted, and rejoice, that the good God has removed from you the occasion of leading an easy,luxurious,and dangerous life. He himself inflicts on you the penance you might otherwise shrink from inflicting on yourselves; for if you bear your daily trials,troubles,and annoyances with a good intention for God's sake, you will have mortifications enough. Do not envy those who enjoy prosperity in this world, but rather condole with them. Nevertheless, we must not give way to rash judgments against our neighbor. We cannot see everything, and therefore we are often deceived by outward appearances. Many a one seems to us to lead an easy,indolent life,who has in reality an abundance of hidden trials and crosses to bear, or else he may secretly afflict himself by voluntary mortifications. The silken garment sometimes conceals the rough hair-shirt. Even at a well-furnished table, the taste is often severely mortified by being deprived of some favorite article of food. While the laugh is on the lips,the heart is frequently devoured with anguish. Still, generally speaking, I say of those who really lead an easy, luxurious life, (no matter who they are); Do not envy them, but rather condole with them ; do not grudge them the happiness they appear to enjoy, but, rather, have the

greatest pity for them ; for like unreasoning beasts they are hastening, even while feasting, to the slaughter-house. You, indeed, now weep, while they laugh; you suffer hunger and thirst, while they abound in everything; you are plagued with severe labor, while they lead idle, sensual lives; but be content with what God has ordained for you. The time will come when you will laugh, and they will weep; when you will be filled, and they will suffer hunger and thirst like dogs; when you will rejoice in endless peace and delights, while they will be eternally tormented.

The rich glutton was clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day (Luke 16:19), while poor Lazarus had to suffer the pangs of hunger: "Who lay at his gate full of sores, desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one did give him"(Luke 16:20,21). But how different it was with them at the end! When the rich man was fattened up, the butcher, Death, came: "The rich man also died, and he was buried in hell"(Ibid.22). And what became of Lazarus? "It came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom"(Ibid.). Why was the rich man condemned to suffer in hell? "Son," answered Abraham, "remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime" (Ibid.25). Why was Lazarus brought into the joys of heaven "and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (Ibid.). Is that the end of an easy, luxurious life, and of a mortified, penitential one? Oh, if such be the case, I do not wish to enjoy pleasures! In future, I shall be content with my state, and will leave abundance to those who wish to have it. Let others eat, drink, and sleep well; let them pamper their bodies, and laugh, and enjoy themselves. My desire is to chastise my flesh, and give it up to mortification and self-denial, so that I may save my soul forever; for I cannot have two heavens, one here, and another hereafter. If, therefore, I have now to sigh, with the afflicted Job on the dung-hill: "The flesh being consumed, my bone hath cleaved to my skin" (Job 19: 20), I will also console myself with the same Job, saying, "I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God: this my

hope is laid up in my bosom" (Ibid.26: 27). In this flesh of mine, which is now mortified and afflicted ; in this flesh, which is now emaciated by daily labor ; in this flesh, which is now often tormented by hunger and thirst, want and poverty ; in this flesh, which is now worn out by illness and weakness, and tried by all kinds of contradictions, in this flesh I shall see my God, and taste an everlasting comfort and pleasure! Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

PENANCE IN PROSPERITY AND IN ADVERSITY.

"Who art thou?" John 1 : 19.

"Who are you ?" Are you a sinner who have offended your God? If you are, you must do penance ; not merely the light penance enjoined on you in confession, but you must endeavor, in the spirit of contrition, to make atonement to God for the injuries offered him, and to chastise the wantonness of your flesh, which was the instigator and occasion of your sins. "Who are you?" Are you a prosperous man, who lives in comfort or luxury, or are you poor and in adversity, so that you have many crosses and trials to contend with ? Learn then from this sermon :

I. What sort of penance they must do who live in prosperity, and
II. What sort of penance they must perform who suffer adversity.

I. Some people when they hear works of penance mentioned, immediately imagine all kinds of fearful mortifications, such as the Saints practised, under the inspiration of an heroic sanctity. They shudder at the thought of fasting on bread and water, sleeping on bare boards, or walking barefoot in processions and pilgrimages.

My dear brethren, if such things were really demanded of us by the divine justice, would it be exacting too much from us in satisfaction for the grievous injuries we have offered it? Would

such penance be too severe for the flesh that has merited hell-fire by its excesses? Would it be too much to escape the tedious torments of purgatory? Or too great a price for the indescribable, eternal joys of heaven? Our God is a God crowned with thorns; a God whose whole body was torn with scourges, whose hands and feet were pierced with nails, who suffered all the torments of hunger and thirst, and whose only refreshment was vinegar and gall; who died a public and shameful death on the cross, and yet, we plead that we, his members, are too weak, too delicate to undertake any austerities!

With the prudence of the flesh, we urge that we must not injure our health, we must do nothing to shorten our life, which we are bound, by the law of God, to preserve for his service. I do not mean to say that all, without exception, should practise severe austerities; but on the other hand do we plead our weakness or delicacy when there is question of satisfying our impure passions, or of otherwise enjoying ourselves? Oh, no; we are strong enough for that! We are not afraid of wind or weather on such occasions. We do not hesitate to spend whole nights dancing and amusing ourselves, so that we can hardly drag one foot after the other the next day, and yet we do not fear any injury to our health. What trying efforts are made to please others, to satisfy the claims of vanity, to follow the customs of the world! People drink to excess, even against their will, and thus sow the seeds of many a disease, solely for the sake of the company in which they are. They never think of their health then. Numbers of women and girls actually torture themselves (would that they did as much for God's sake!), in order to follow the fashion, with tight lacing and narrow shoes, (so that every step must be a torment to them), their teeth chattering meanwhile from the cold, on account of the low-necked dresses they wear in the depth of winter. If they only suffered as much for the sake of satisfying for their sins and going to heaven! But they do it solely to please men; and they are not the least afraid of injuring their health thereby, or of overtasking their strength. Yet these very people are too weak to abstain a little now and then, from food

and drink. They are too delicate to wear a penitential girdle, or to suffer the least inconvenience or cold, to atone for their sins. Their health will not allow them to rise a little earlier in the morning, I will not say, to deprive themselves of sleep during the night, in order to praise God. Oh, no; we have enough health and strength for vice and vanity, but we are too delicate to practise penance and mortification.

I do not exhort or advise all, without exception, to practise great penances. No ; for even the holiest and greatest penitents have not always made use of them, nor have they employed them all at once. In this, as in other matters, reason, common sense and the counsel of one's confessor must be considered. Different people require different penances ; one must mortify himself in the time of temptation, another, when he enjoys interior peace ; and the penance that can be employed now and then with great profit would lose all its value, if employed constantly.

There are easy ways of doing penance and mortifying one's senses and passions which can be reasonably practised by all, and which when animated by a pure intention, are of the greatest use in atoning for sin and gaining merit. A penance of this kind would be, for instance, to keep one's eyes fixed on the ground for a certain time, and not to look at some pleasing object or person, saying in the heart; "For thy sake, O God, I will refrain from looking at what would give me pleasure!" The youthful St. Aloysius Gonzaga was, for three whole years, a page in the service of Mary of Austria, queen of Spain, who was regarded as a miracle of beauty. Aloysius had to be in her presence daily ; but he never as much as knew her by sight. When he was asked how she looked he had to answer candidly that he could not tell, as he had never seen her. I happen to hear a noise in the street; my first inclination is to run to the window to see what it is about ; but suddenly, I restrain myself, and make up my mind not to look out, in order to mortify myself for God's sake. And the same may be said of other things that we willingly look at. St. Francis Borgia, while he was still in the world,

as duke of Gandia, used frequently to mortify himself in that way; he was passionately fond of hawking, and often, when the hawk was on the point of seizing its prey, he would turn away his eyes, in order to make a sacrifice to God of the pleasure he would have had in looking at what was the most interesting part of the sport. Again: I am anxious to hear something new or curious, but I restrain myself; or, if something is being told in my presence, I try to divert my attention, so as not to understand the subject of conversation. There is a fair and fragrant flower in the garden; my nostrils long to inhale its odor; my hand is already stretched out to pluck it, but, for God's sake, I overcome myself, and let it be. I have a fine opportunity to give a sharp answer, but I mortify myself, and hold my tongue. I have a great dislike for a certain person, and cannot bear to be in his company; but I do violence to myself, and speak to him in a friendly manner, although very much against my inclination. I go to visit a poor sick man, as the Christian law exhorts me, and, in spite of my natural repugnance, I attend to his wants and make his bed. And so on. Such penitential works as these, my dear brethren, do not cost a drop of blood, nor cause pain to any member of the body. They appear very trifling and insignificant, and not beyond the strength of a child; yet you may be assured that they are of great importance in the sight of God, and the habit of practising them is a sign of no mean virtue. They attract no notice, and demand no great effort; but they sometimes better atone for sin, than daily fasting or a severe discipline.

With regard to the sense of taste, if, beyond the ordinary fast days, one cannot, or will not suffer hunger or thirst, there are yet plenty of opportunities of overcoming one's self. For instance, by not tasting an apple or some other delicacy that comes in one's way outside of meal times; by standing up from table, before being fully satisfied; by not using salt or other condiments with articles of food that are insipid without them; by either abstaining completely from a certain thing that one is fond of, or at least by allowing the best bits of it to remain untasted;

by not eating or drinking at once when one is suffering from hunger or thirst, but waiting a few minutes, although one has the food or drink in his hand. Oh, certainly, a mortification of that kind is most acceptable to God!

King David showed great bravery and fearlessness when he attacked the giant Goliath with his shepherd's sling, and cut off his head; but, according to the testimony of the holy Fathers, he gained a still greater victory when he was leading his army against the Philistines. The heat of the day and the numerous cares that oppressed him caused him then to suffer from violent thirst and exhaustion, so that he cried out: "Oh, that some man would give me drink of the water out of the cistern, that is in Bethlehem by the gate"(2 Kings 23: 15). Three of his bravest soldiers had hardly heard this wish of their king, when they strove to fulfil it. There was no way for them to get at the cistern, but to break through the enemies' camp. This they did with the greatest heroism, filled a vessel with the water of the cistern, and brought it to the king. David, who was looking out for them eagerly, at once grasped the vessel, and was about to raise it to his lips, when he suddenly looked up to heaven and, with unexampled heroism, poured the coveted water on the ground without tasting it: "But he would not drink," says the holy Scripture, "but offered it to the Lord" (Ibid. 16). Thus he sacrificed to God the refreshment that he could have taken without sin, nay, that was almost necessary to him under the circumstances.

Because he remembered that he had acted unlawfully, he wished to abstain even from lawful enjoyments. He whose conscience reproaches him with having indulged too much in sensual pleasures during his youth, or later on in life, so that he has sinned like David, or even worse, now, that he understands the matter more clearly, should use the same severity with himself, and abstain frequently from pleasures that are innocent, lawful, and remote from all danger of offending God. For it is but right that he should now practise self-restraint on the narrow path of virtue, and serve God zealously, since he formerly gave a loose rein to

his passions on the broad road that leads to destruction.

Finally, with regard to the chastisement of the body, if the severe penances of the Saints inspire us with horror and fear, why should we not make up our minds to stand for an hour to hear the word of God in a sermon, although it seems to us rather an uncomfortable position? I know very well that there are ladies and gentlemen who think that an excessive inconvenience, and who, to avoid it, remain away from a sermon that would perhaps be of more use to them than hearing Mass of devotion or going to holy Communion; but when there is question of witnessing a play at the theatre, or seeing a great man enter the town in public procession, they can stand for hours without complaining. Why should we not, now and then, look out for an uneven piece of wood, or a stone, and kneel on it for a while in order to practise that little mortification whilst praying to God? And in the evening, before going to bed, could we not unobserved pray for a short time with outstretched arms, or prostrate ourselves on the ground, kissing it in sign of humility and of our sincere acknowledgment that, since we have offended God, we are not worthy to be on the earth? Every day, we have opportunities of mortifications of that kind. For instance, in the morning, when we awake, and are tempted to lie still a little longer, let us rise at once, and thus begin the day with an act of mortification, sacrificing for God's sake that pleasure of a few moments. Believe me, my dear brethren, it requires frequently a great amount of self-denial to deprive one's self of even a few moments' rest in that way. The pleasure taken away from the body is very small, but the gain to the soul is great. Another opportunity of daily mortification is offered us by the changes of the weather; it is either too harsh and windy, or too cold and rainy, or too hot and sweltering. Oh, there are only too many who are so delicate that they neglect church and sermon, because it is either too cold, or too hot! Is it too much to bear patiently with an inconvenience of that kind, which no one can avoid, and to offer it to God in atonement for our sins?

All that I have said on this subject amounts to this: He who has sinned must do penance, and not treat his flesh too delicately, but often deprive it of even lawful pleasures and enjoyments, since he has unlawfully indulged it in forbidden pleasures. Curious eyes and ears, talkative and defamatory tongue, unchaste and unjust hands, wanton and dissolute flesh, what else are ye but arms with which wickedness makes war on the Most High? St. Paul warns us against that abuse in these words: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of iniquity unto sin" (Rom. 6: 13); rather, he continues: "Present yourself to God, as those that are alive from the dead; and your members as instruments of justice unto God" (Ibid.), which is done by those who make war on themselves. If you still find it too difficult to thus practise constant mortification of the senses, then imitate the willing debtor who desires, but is not able to pay at once all he owes. Every day he subtracts something from his unnecessary household expenses; to-day a shilling, to-morrow another, and so on, until he has gathered together the necessary sum. In the same way, to-day, you can mortify your eyes, to-morrow your mouth, and the day after some other sensual desire. Say, with the servant in the Gospel who was unable to pay the ten thousand talents he owed his master: "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all" (Matt. 18: 26); little by little the whole debt shall be paid off. Thus, while Christians learn that penance is necessary for those who live in comfort and prosperity, they must also know that it is necessary even for those repentant sinners whose lives are hard and full of trials.

"God help us!" I think I hear some of my listeners exclaim: "and do you expect *us* to do penance also? Heaven knows we have penance enough! We are so poor that we must beg our bread from door to door; is not that sufficient? We and our children suffer in secret the pangs of hunger and thirst, and for shame dare not beg; is not that penance enough?" "I," says another, "have been for a number of years bed-ridden with a grievous illness, and cannot even get up to go to church; is not that penance enough?"

"From morning till night," says the laborer, "I must be at work, in order to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow ; is not that penance enough?" "Are not the constant cares and troubles of the married state sufficient punishment for the sins that we married people commit ? Is it not hard enough night and day to have to care for a house full of little children, obstinate and disobedient, sickly and peevish children ? to have to live with a passionate, ill-tempered, drunken husband, who beats me if I say a word to him, or with a discontented, peevish, idle, or extravagant wife ?" "Is it not penance enough to have to bear with a brother or sister, who worries me the whole day long, and who is full of faults ?" "Is it not penance enough to have to run up and down from morning till night, and yet not succeed in pleasing my master or mistress ?" "Is it not hard enough to be deprived of father and mother, and to have to submit to persecution and ill-treatment as a poor orphan ?" Wherever we turn, we find crosses and trials ; are they not penance enough ? Must we chastise our bodies in the bargain ? Must we ? . . . .Enough, dear Christians, it is not my intention to inflict new torments on you by way of penance ; I freely acknowledge that you have often enough to suffer. One thing, however, you must not forget ; there is a great difference between suffering *and* suffering. To have to endure labor and trouble, care and vexation, to suffer hunger and thirst, crosses and misery, is not always to do penance. Otherwise even horses and beasts of burden would do penance, for they often have to work hard, and to bear hunger and thirst and cruel treatment. Cain was sent into banishment and misery, and yet he did not do penance. The impenitent thief hung on the cross, and died as well as Christ ; but he did not do penance. *To suffer without the proper motive* is not to atone for sin, while to suffer with impatience and murmuring, instead of being an atonement for sin, is rather collecting new material for penance, and adding to our punishment. The suffering that avails to the atonement for our sins must be endured willingly and with a proper motive.

And what, you ask, is suffering willingly ? You must make a

virtue of necessity. By patience, contentment, and a good intention you must change into a voluntary penance that which, at first, happened against your will and appeared hard and disagreeable to you. This is the teaching of the Council of Trent: "So generously does God act towards us, that we can satisfy God the Father, through Jesus Christ, for our sins, not only by performing voluntary penances, or the satisfaction imposed on us by the priest in confession, but also by patiently bearing the temporal chastisements inflicted on us by God."

Penitent sinners, cry out with the prophet David: "I am ready for scourges. . . I will declare my iniquity, and I will think for my sin" (Ps. 37 : 18, 19): or with the good thief on the cross: "We indeed suffer justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds" (Luke 23 : 41). With a like will and intention, dear Christians, make penances of your daily crosses, and then, as I freely acknowledge once more, you do not need any others. One can easily err through imprudence in self-inflicted penances; but yours come straight from the hand of God, and if you receive them as I have said, there is no chance of your making a mistake. If you give way to impatience and discontent under protracted trials—what good will that do you? You will have to suffer all the same, and your sufferings will be profitless. Console yourselves with the thought of the joy that is in store for you. When the sick man is in the hands of the surgeon, he cries out against the burning and cutting, and the bitter remedies, but when he is cured, and his wounds are healed, he kisses with joy the hand, the knife, the iron, that inflicted the salutary wound; the doctor becomes his dearest friend, to whom, under God, he owes his life. Believe me, my dear brethren, it will be just the same with you. Like the sufferer under the knife, you will sometimes cry out, and complain of your crosses as cruel; but wait till your cure is accomplished, and you will bless God for having sent them for the good of your souls.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE PENANCE OF THE INNOCENT AND THE JUST.

"*And he came into all the country about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins.*" Luke 3 : 3.

The heroic St. John the Baptist was a model of innocence and justice of whom our Lord said that there never was a greater born of woman ; yet he goes about publicly preaching the baptism of penance. What kind of a baptism ? Not that of our holy Sacrament of Baptism, which now cleanses our souls from original sin. What kind of a penance ? Not that of our Sacrament of Penance, in which, after having confessed our sins with true sorrow, we are absolved from them; for both these Sacraments were afterwards instituted by Christ. What was the penance, then? St. John himself explains it when he says to those who came to him to be baptized: "Bring forth fruits worthy of penance" (Luke 3:8). In these words he alluded to the sorrow they should have for sin, as well as to the penitential works they should voluntarily undertake in order to satisfy the divine justice. But suppose, my dear brethren, that one has paid to the last farthing the debt incurred by sin, or that one has never sinned ; even in that case, I say,

The innocent and the just must do penance, because they may sin in future.

There are two classes of men who are in the friendship, grace, and favor of God. The first consists of those who have sinned grievously, but have done penance, and have become reconciled to God; and they constitute the greater number of the just. For how many adults are there who dare use the words of the innocent Job ? "My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake; for my heart doth not reprehend me in all my

life" (Job 27: 6). Who is there who can say, with truth, that his conscience does not reproach him with any sin? Alas! few are they who have still preserved their baptismal innocence, who have never offended God, at least mortally and deliberately! O happy souls! If envy could find place in heaven, how many of the greatest Saints, whose feasts the Catholic Church celebrates every year, would envy you your great happiness!

Those who belong to the first class are like a servant who has robbed his master, or whose carelessness with fire has caused the latter to suffer loss. Confidence in him has been shaken, his fault is remembered even after it has been repaired. You, O sinner, have deliberately robbed your Lord and master of his glory when you contemned his Commandments! Consider what a dangerous conflagration the careless servant, that is, the flesh with its senses and members, has caused; a conflagration that has destroyed all the merits of the soul, and exposed it to the eternal flames of hell. Now you are saved from the danger. By true sorrow and contrition, by the tears of repentance you have shed, you have completely extinguished that otherwise eternal fire. You may even have repaired all the damage caused by your theft or carelessness, having completely wiped away all the punishment due to your sins, by the perfection of your sorrow, or by works of satisfaction, so that you owe nothing more to the divine justice.

But should you, therefore, give yourself no further trouble about the matter? How about the master of the house, I mean the soul, which has had such great difficulty in extinguishing the fire? How about the insolent servants, the senses, who by their wantonness and carelessness have injured their master, and caused that dangerous fire? Must they now be allowed to go unpunished and to do as they please, seeking only their own comfort and convenience? Can the soul altogether restrain its just indignation against them, or refrain from carefully watching and restraining them? Ah! believe me, that there is reason enough for fearing that they will again attempt their former mischief; they are still reckless; their evil inclinations are not yet completely subdued. The strong

man armed must keep his court, he must keep in check the enemy within the walls.

As to those who are still innocent, they are like the good horse ; they have kept up their pace, and, as David says, they have run on without delay in the way of God's commandments, but alas, for the weakness and instability of man, how many there are who have begun well, but ended most disgracefully ! David made an excellent beginning, but he became a murderer and an adulterer. Solomon, his son, also began well ; but afterwards, he gave way to his carnal desires ; he adored gods of stone, to please his concubines, and offered incense to them. Saul, who preceded these two, also began very well. "Saul, a choice and goodly man," such is the testimony the Holy Scripture gives of him, "there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he" (Kings 9 : 2). And yet, how obstinate and rebellious he became, because he did not restrain his evil inclinations. He was rejected by God on account of disobedience, and killed himself in despair. Reason enough, therefore, have we to take to heart the warning of St. Paul : "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10 : 12).

In a word, no matter how innocent we are, we are still capable of committing sin. Although the horse has been good hitherto, he must be made to feel the bit and the spur frequently, so as to prevent him from lagging or stumbling. The most innocent bodies are in need of works of penance and mortification, lest, by unrestrained indulgence in even lawful pleasures, they rebel against authority. But you ask: Is it not cruelty to treat an innocent person with severity. Cruelty, indeed! A cruel kindness! Our God is not cruel or unjust, but is infinitely good and merciful, and yet he allowed the devil to torment most cruelly the innocent Job. He is a God who always means well to his children, and yet he visits even the holiest of them in this life with various trials and crosses. But these latter know well his paternal goodness, and therefore, they meekly kiss the rod, saying with holy Job: "Blessed be the name of the Lord;" he knows best what is good for us, and if

he does not send us those trials to atone for past sins, his intention, then, is to save us from future sins.

This is what should impel even the most innocent, as well as those who have sinned grievously, to mortify themselves frequently; the former, that they may not begin to sin; the latter, that they may not relapse into it. For as the Council of Trent says, there is nothing that can better preserve one free from sin than voluntary penances and mortifications. The remembrance of the pain we have suffered, and for which our fastidious nature has only dislike and disgust, will deter us from doing what is followed by such sharp retribution. St. Augustine declares that satisfaction is required for sin, after its guilt has been remitted, lest we should think little of sin if punishment were to cease as soon as its guilt is taken away. Thus the body must be made to feel something, if it is to be frightened from falling into sin; hence the innocent may argue in the following manner: If I have to do penance to keep myself from offending God, what would I not have to suffer were I actually guilty of mortal sin? If I deny myself even lawful pleasures and gratifications for the love of God, will I not be far more ready to abhor illicit ones, and embrace bitter trials to avoid offending God?

Besides, no matter how innocent or pious one may be, he has inherited from our first parents, evil inclinations and desires, which never wholly die out in him. No matter how sincerely one repents of his sins, or how thoroughly he has atoned for them, the evil habits and relics of sin still remain to entice him, like a second nature, to commit the same sins, and it requires a long time to eradicate these. Penitent Christian, you have been truly sorry for your sins and have duly confessed them; the good God has forgiven you and admitted you to his grace and friendship; I will even imagine that all the punishment due to your sins has also been remitted. Rejoice, then, with all your heart, and thank God; "the father is dead;" the cause and origin of your guilt and punishment are taken away; but be not, therefore, too confident; "he is as if he were not dead;" he still lives on in his

children, in your evil desires and inclinations. The tree which has borne such bad fruits has been cut down; but its roots are still in the ground, and it can easily begin to grow again. Your mortal illness has been healed by the Blood of Christ, which has been poured over you in the Sacrament of Penance; but the strength of the soul is not yet by any means fully restored; the inordinate desire of the former forbidden pleasures is not yet fully extinguished, and may easily bring on a relapse.

Hear king David, crying out to God after his sin was repented of and pardoned: "Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin"(Ps. 1 : 4). I still feel the force of old habit and evil inclination; the relics of my former sins still inflame my desires, and try to drag me, as if by violence, into forbidden pleasures; therefore "wash me yet more from my iniquity."

Now, my dear brethren, how are these evil effects of sin to be destroyed? By often renewing our sorrow and contrition? By gaining the indulgences granted by the Church? By constant and earnest prayer, and the practice of good works? Yes, these are all very powerful means of obtaining remission of the punishment still due to sin, and of increasing our merit and glory in heaven; but they are not able to destroy at once the relics of sin and the evil habits of the sinner. The old, bad habit must be opposed by a new and contrary one; immortification of the eyes must be amended by checking their curiosity and not allowing them to gaze on lawful delights; pride is corrected by voluntary humiliations; gluttony and drunkenness, by fasting and abstinence; slander, backbiting, and detraction, cursing and swearing, by the rather difficult remedy of silence; while the wantonness of the flesh is chastised by the use of different instruments of penance and by bearing patiently the trials sent by God. "Every valley shall be filled," cried out St. John the Baptist, when he was publicly exhorting the people to do penance; "and every mountain and hill shall be brought low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways, plain" (Luke 3: 5). Herein, he describes the wonderful effects of true penance. What

appears more difficult than to fill up deep valleys, level lofty mountains, and make crooked ways straight? And yet that is what is done, in a moral sense, by penance and mortification. "The valleys are filled," that is, the soul, that has been completely emptied by sin of its merits and virtues, becomes filled up again by penance. "Every mountain and hill shall be brought low;" that is, the pride which dared to lift itself up against the Almighty God shall be humbled by penance. "The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways plain;" that is, inordinate desires and inclinations must be tamed by mortification and self-denial, and the bad habits that have been contracted must be abandoned, in order to live according to the law and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Besides, (we know by experience), that he who wishes to avoid sin must diligently avoid its occasions. "He that loveth danger," says the Holy Ghost, "shall perish in it" (Ecclus. 3 : 27). How many dangerous occasions are there not, in unrestrained liberty in seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and speaking, while mortification and self-denial cut off the occasion at once!

Finally, there is nothing so likely to move the already most generous God to bestow his graces liberally on man, and to provide him with special helps to keep him from further sin, than to see him humbly chastising himself, and keeping a strict watch over himself, even in lawful enjoyments. Thus man, by being severe to himself, vies, as it were, with God, and compels him to be more merciful and more generous. Worn out by fasting, we assail heaven by envy, and compel God to show us his favor and mercy. Ah! my dear brethren, if you ask the Saints, especially those who always retained their innocence, why they chastised their bodies so unmercifully; if you ask holy Job how he was able to bear with such astounding patience the trials that God allowed him to be afflicted with, and, why he declared that he did "penance in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6); if you ask the sinless John the Baptist why he wore the rough camel's-hair garment, and why he fasted so strictly; or St. Bernard, why he scourged himself so severely, and observed such rigorous fasts, although he was so weak in body, that he more resembled a walking

skeleton than a living man; or St. Aloysius, St. Edmund, or the royal saint, Eleonora Teresa, why, though innocent and holy, they disciplined themselves to blood, they would answer you in the words that St. Bernard used when speaking of St. John the Baptist: "Although we had not sinned, yet we were but mortal, and were capable of sinning so that we had to keep our bodies in check, in order to preserve our innocence."

"I chastise my body," says St. Paul, "and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. 9 : 27). He does not say, I chastised my body in the beginning of my conversion, or for some years after, in order to atone for my sins; but, "I *chastise* it" now, whilst I am preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and enduring many great trials and countless persecutions. "I chastise my body", and why, O great saint? "Lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away" (Ibid. 26). But, how could you be afraid of that? Your own conscience bore testimony to you that you were a child of God and a co-heir of Christ? Why should you dread eternal damnation, after your repeated protestations that "neither death, nor life . . . nor things present, nor things to come . . . nor any other creature should be able to separate you from the love of God?" (Ibid. 27.) How is it that, in spite of all you did for the glory of God and the good of souls, you were afraid of losing your soul, unless you chastised your body?

Alas, how will it then be with me and others? With me, who am so careful in looking after my own comfort; who cannot endure the least bodily inconvenience, unless for the sake of worldly vanity; nay, who pamper my body so that it becomes for myself as well as for others an occasion of sin? How shall it be with me, who am so ready with all kinds of empty pretexts and excuses, in order to obtain permission to gratify my sensuality by eating meat during the Lent; who cannot bear any trouble, and act in those trials that I must bear in any case as if I had the torments of hell to suffer? Alas, what will become of me? Now I see how it is that I have so often fallen into sin, in spite of the good resolutions I made in confession. I was unwilling to use

violence against myself, and I indulged my body and its outward senses too freely, so that they became too strong for me. But I shall in future keep a more watchful eye on those careless servants; I will make that stubborn horse feel the bit and the spur, so that I may be armed against temptations, keep my soul free from sin, and be surer of gaining the endless joys of heaven. Amen.

SUNDAY IN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS DAY.

THE REASONABLENESS OF WORKS OF PENANCE FOR ALL CHRISTIANS.

"*This Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted.*" Luke 2 : 34.

Hardly is the Saviour of the world born, when the contradictions and sufferings that were in store for him are predicted by Simeon : "He is set for a sign which shall be contradicted." Already, too, is addressed to Mary the terrible prophecy, later to be fulfilled in the Passion and death of her divine Son : "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce." Ah ! yes, my dear brethren, from the Crib to the Cross, the life of the innocent Son of God is one unbroken chain of the most severe penances and mortifications. And shall we, his followers, shrink from sufferings, and treat our flesh so delicately ? Sinners that we are, deserving of hell-fire, and liable through weakness, to relapse at any moment into past crimes, have we not reason to fear, if we cease doing penance, that we shall be amongst the vast number of those unhappy ones for whose "fall" (as the prophet foretold) this divine child of Bethlehem "is set"? Heaven forbid, my dear brethren ! If what you have already heard has not convinced you of the necessity for all Christians to do penance,—reflect still further to-day on these two reasonable points :

I. That as Christians we live under a suffering and mortified God; therefore,

II. We must imitate him in suffering and mortification.

I. What are we mortals on this earth, my dear brethren? "We are members one of another" (Eph. 4: 25), says St. Paul; we constitute the moral body of the Catholic Church under one head. What Head is that? "Know you not," asks St. Paul again, "that your bodies are the members of Christ?" (1 Cor. 6:15.) "We may in all things grow up in him, who is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4: 15). But of what kind is this Head?

Give a short glance at the whole life of Jesus Christ. He was born in a miserable stable, and was laid in a manger instead of a bed. He suffered in his circumcision, when, as a little child only a week old, he shed his blood. He suffered in the flight into Egypt, in which, in addition to the discomforts he had to endure, he was persecuted by his own creatures. He suffered during the thirty years of his hidden life in the poor little cottage of Nazareth, unknown to the world, yielding his will to obedience, and earning his bread by the sweat of his brow, as a poor carpenter's apprentice. He suffered during the last three years of his life, when, after a fast of forty days and nights, he went on foot from one town to the other, in heat and cold, in rain and wind, preaching and teaching. Many a night he spent in vigils, as the Gospel says of him: "He passed the whole night in the prayer of God" (Luke 6 : 12). Many a time he slept on the bare ground; many a time wearied with his journeys, he sat down on a hard stone to rest himself; while he often begged from others food and drink when he was hungry and thirsty, sought hospitality at the hands of strangers, and even asked them for a drink of water.

And Oh! what did he not suffer in the last days of his bitter Passion! He was truly "a Man of sorrows." He was bound with ropes as a malefactor; he was goaded along with blows and buffets; he was crowned with sharp thorns piercing even to the brain; he was scourged with whips: and at last, nailed hand

and foot to the cross, hanging thereon for three hours in his terrible death-agony, there was not a member of his body that had not its own most piercing pain to endure; not one of his exterior senses that was not tortured in the most excruciating manner; his eyes were swollen and bloodshot; his ears were afflicted by the horrible blasphemies and curses that were uttered around him; his taste was tortured by the gall and vinegar that were given him to drink, while the sense of feeling was afflicted most grievously in every part of his sacred body. He fulfilled, in short, all the conditions of true penance as if he were a penitent sinner. What a bitter examination of conscience he made in the Garden of Gethsemani when he reviewed, considered and foresaw all the past, present, and future sins of the whole world! What perfect contrition he had for those sins when he was sorrowful even unto death, shedding as it were, tears of blood for them, through every one of his sacred pores! What a humble confession he made, when, laden with the huge burden of our iniquities, he stood before his judge, like a convicted criminal, to hear the sentence that condemned him to the cross? What severe penance and satisfaction he offered for those sins, when he suffered the atrocious tortures of his shameful death? And all this he endured, although perfectly innocent, partly in order to show us how to do penance for our sins, how to confess them, and how to satisfy for them; and partly in order to show us the right road to heaven, which can be gained only by a holy violence.

What sort of members suit such a Head as this? Compare a voluptuous Christian, who can neither bear temporal trials with patience, nor mortify or overcome himself, with our Saviour and his life? Behold a Head crowned with sharp thorns, while the feet are resting on a cushion of roses; a Head emaciated with hunger and thirst, and a body sleek and well-conditioned; a Head deformed and swollen with blows, and a body clothed in costly array! Christ in the extreme of poverty, and the Christian in abundance and luxury. Christ in labor and trials, and the Christian in comfort and affluence! Christ quenching his thirst with gall and

vinegar, and the Christian glutting himself with the costliest liquors and viands! Christ on the hard wood of the cross, and the Christian on a soft down bed. Innocence doing penance, and the sinner indulging his sensuality! Could a greater contrast be found? How can an immortified man dare to take the crucifix in his hand, or look on it without blushing? Even the dumb image reproves him. "Yes," it says to him, "you are, indeed, a fine Christian! I, your God, am hanging here on the cross, and you are bent on enjoying yourself. I am doing penance for your sins, and you think it is enough to merely declare them in confession, without taking any further trouble about them. I must suffer, and thereby enter into my glory; while you imagine you can be driven comfortably into heaven, in a coach and four!"

What a piercing reproof! Learn, Christians, that even the most innocent souls must do penance in order to be conformed to their divine Model, Christ. When Hannibal, the great Carthaginian hero, was crossing the Alps to advance with his great army upon Rome, seeing the terrible risk and loss of life, some of his soldiers began to murmur and complain. Seeing this, he mounted a high rock and harangued them, in a loud voice, reproaching them for their want of courage, and concluding with these words: "Recollect that you are not going before Hannibal, but following him." I go before you to show you the way; I am the first to climb the rugged mountains. This short exhortation encouraged the soldiers to follow him boldly.

A similar instance is narrated in the First Book of Machabees. Simon Machabæus, the Jewish general, was advancing with twenty thousand men to attack the vast forces of the enemy (Mach. 16 : 5). Between the opposing armies there was a running river, which the soldiers hesitated to cross. What did Simon do? "He saw that the people were afraid to go over the river, so he went over first" (Ibid. 6). Without saying a word to them, he set spurs to his horse, and crossed the river at once. "Then the men, seeing him, passed over after him" (Ibid.).

If we had been present on the occasion, my dear brethren, and

had seen regiment after regiment following their leader's example, and crossing the river with their officers, while a few of the common soldiers remained behind on the bank, afraid to wet their feet, would we not have cried out to the latter: "Cowards that you are! Are your lives more valuable than those of your general and his brave officers?" Delicate, voluptuous Christians, think of yourselves, and blush! You tremble at the bare idea of crosses and sufferings, fasting and disciplines, self-denial and mortification of the flesh! We too have enemies to combat. They attack us on all sides without intermission, the cunning demon, the perverse world, and our own corrupt flesh; and if we give way to them, we are lost. Certainly it is sometimes hard to fight them. We have to cross a running river; but Jesus Christ, our sovereign Lord and General, precedes us, crowned with thorns, bearing the marks of the nails and scourges, and crying out to us, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9: 23). Christ is not following you, but going on before you. He is the first to bear the cross, and his cross is the heaviest of all. He first crossed the river of extreme poverty and humiliation, of bitter suffering, self-denial and mortification, and men seeing him (as they see him still by the light of faith), have

II. "Passed over after him." So, have followed him, the men and women of strict Religious Orders, who live in voluntary poverty, denying themselves all lawful pleasures, that they may spend their lives in frequent prayer and vigils, and unceasing mortification of their bodies. So have followed him the innocent and the penitent of all ages and sexes, treating themselves with the greatest severity, so as to resemble more closely their suffering, crucified God. And can there be a Christian so cowardly, so degenerate as to refuse to follow his Lord and God at least at a distance, by voluntarily taking up his cross and mortifying himself? "For shame," says St. Bernard, "to be a delicate member under a Head crowned with thorns!"

Hear what the Council of Trent says: "The life of a Christian should be a perpetual penance." It must necessarily be so; there is no other way to heaven than that by which Jesus Christ has gone there before us, and which he has taught us by his example. "He that taketh not up his cross and followeth me," he has said, "is not worthy of me"(Matt. 10:38). And again: "I am the door" (John 10 : 9). He who does not enter through me, cannot have eternal life. "What," asks St. Augustine, "is meant by entering through Christ?" And he answers: "It means to imitate the life of Christ," to walk in the path wherein he walked. St. Paul too expressly teaches that: "Whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son ; that he might be the firstborn amongst many brethren" (Rom. 8: 29). Why does St. Paul say that we must be "made conformable to the image" of the Son of God ? There is a great difference, my dear brethren, between an artist who looks at a picture in order to copy it, and an art-dealer who merely wishes to buy the picture, or simply to admire it. The latter runs his eyes two or three times over it, and admires the skill of the painter. "That is a beautiful picture," he says; and buying it, he brings it home, and hangs it on the wall of his room. That is all. The former, on the other hand, intending to copy the picture, looks at it critically a hundred times on all sides. Nor is he satisfied with that. He takes his brush, and every time he makes a stroke with it, he looks at the picture again, so as to be sure of accurately reproducing every line of it. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a picture that we must not merely look at and admire. If that were all that is necessary to salvation, all Catholics would be amongst the elect. Hardly is there one who has not a crucifix in his house, which he looks at now and then. Hardly one, who is not struck with admiration when he reads or hears of the penitent and suffering life of our Lord. But this is not enough. Christ is our great Model. We must copy him closely in our lives and actions. "Look, and make it according to the pattern, that was shown thee on the mount" (Exod. 25: 40). Cast your eyes on this picture, O

man! but not only look at it. Set your hand to work, to imitate the example that was shown you on Calvary.

Poor, suffering Christians, who have to labor hard in order to earn your daily bread, or who are oppressed by sickness, suffering and persecution, what a consolation it is for you, if you are only in the state of grace, to be able to bear your daily crosses and trials with patience, and to offer them to God, your friend, by a supernatural intention. Rejoice and be glad in the Lord ; for he imprints daily on your soul the beautiful image of his crucified Son, and makes up for the penances that you should otherwise have inflicted on yourselves. If you sometimes find your trials hard to bear, so that weak nature cries out against them, take the crucifix in your hands, and say to yourselves : See, here is my God hanging on the shameful cross, the Holy of Holies suffering even unto death ; why should not I, then, a sinner, be willing to suffer with him ? I, who cannot gain heaven in any other way, why should I not bear patiently for a short time the light cross that is laid on my shoulders ? For by doing so I shall become like to the image of the Son of God, and shall receive the surest pledge of being amongst the chosen children of God.

But, urges some poor sufferer : I do not suffer of my own free will, nor with patience. I am always conscious of a repugnance and dislike for suffering. I am incapable of doing any good work, or even of saying my usual prayers. Occasionally, I make an effort to resign myself to the divine will, but I remain just as discontented as before ; I have no pleasure in the cross, and, if I could, I would free myself from it altogether. How is it, then, possible for me to merit under such circumstances ? O simple souls, do you not know that your present state makes you thoroughly conformable to the image of Jesus Christ crucified ? Tell me, O most merciful Saviour, Pattern and Model of all who suffer and are truly penitent, tell me, for the instruction of these complaining souls,—didst thou thyself prepare the heavy cross thou didst carry on thy own shoulders up the hill of Calvary ? Didst thou fasten thyself to it with thy own hands ? No, the envious

Jews and impious executioners prepared it for me, and made me carry it. My heavenly Father ordained that I should receive it from my bitterest enemies, and therefore, through obedience, I allowed myself to be crucified thereon. And, didst thou, O Lord, feel no dislike or repugnance to the cross? Certainly, I did, so much so, that the bare thought of it made me tremble with fear and anguish in the Garden of Gethsemani, until I sweated blood, and, lying on the ground in anguish, thrice besought my heavenly Father, if it might be done, to take from me that bitter chalice of suffering, and save me from that cruel death. Such aridity of spirit did I suffer, and such extreme desolation of soul, that, while I was hanging on the cross, I openly complained before heaven and earth of having been abandoned by my heavenly Father: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27 : 46.)

Tremble, ye luxurious and effeminate children of the world! You have sinned often and grievously, and have frequently merited hell; yet you still continue to sin, and increase your torments for all eternity. You honor your crucified God with the lips only, while you pamper your bodies and indulge your senses in every possible way, in idleness, comfort, and pleasure. What share, degenerate members, can you expect in your thorn-crowned Head? What else can you expect, but that woe which Christ pronounced on the rich and voluptuous: "Woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation" (Luke 6: 24). "Woe to you that are filled, for you shall hunger" (Ibid. 25). "Woe to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep" (Ibid.).

I beseech of you, resolve in time to lead a life of penance. From this out, in all the difficulties, annoyances, discomforts, and trials that arise from your state of life, your employment, the change of the seasons and the weather, your own weakness and delicacy of constitution, or those that others cause you, or that God himself sends you according to his own good will and pleasure, and which you can neither avoid nor change, determine to bear all crosses patiently and humbly for God's sake and to gain heaven. Secondly, as you are bound to do in any case, avoid those pleasures

which you cannot enjoy without exposing your soul to danger, and undertake those mortifications of the outward senses or inward appetites that are necessary or helpful to avoid sin. Finally, deny yourself from time to time even lawful pleasures and gratifications. In many things do violence to yourself, and sometimes chastise your body by penitential works, that you may prove by your life and actions that you are a true Catholic and a real member of the thorn-crowned Head, that you truly adore a God who suffered and was crucified for you. Make this resolve with me, my dear brethren, not merely for to-day, but for your whole lives. "If we suffer with him, we shall be also glorified with him" (Rom. 8: 17). Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE MISSION OF THE WORD OF GOD FOR PROCRASTINATING SINNERS.

"*They found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions.*" Luke 2 : 46.

As our Lord Jesus Christ, when he wished to show his unheard of love to men, could not wait for the time of his bitter Passion and death, to shed his Saving Blood for them, but already as an Infant, eight days old, poured out the first drops of that precious Blood in the Circumcision, so, he would not wait for the time of his public mission to instruct and convert men, but commenced his office of Preacher in the twelfth year of his age, when he was found amongst the doctors in the temple, explaining the law to them by question and answer. Ah ! if we had only the happiness of once hearing, as they did, the word of life from his own sacred lips, what an effect would it not have on our hearts ! But

what am I saying? Although it is now nearly two thousand years since he appeared in the world in visible form, he still preaches his divine word and explains his law by the mouths of priests. Alas! I should rather exclaim, would that all Christians were diligent enough in hearing his word. Then, indeed, would Christ reap a golden harvest.

I. In the sanctification of the just, and
II. In the conversion of sinners.

I. To every habitual sinner here present (but God forbid that there should be any!), I put the question: Do you wish, sooner or later, to save your soul and go to heaven? Or have you renounced all right to heaven, and determined to be lost forever? One of these alternatives you must choose; there is no third way for you. Have you chosen the latter? Have you made up your mind to burn forever in the fire of hell amongst the demons? Alas! if such is the case, you are already in the state of despair, and I do not wonder that you have no desire to hear the word of God, to come to a sermon. But I can hardly believe that any Catholic in his right senses can form such a desperate resolution as that. Do you then expect some day or other to save your soul, and be happy forever with God in heaven? If so, you must be converted to God by repentance, for that is the one, indispensably necessary means which you must adopt in order to save your soul. And your sorrow and repentance must be *sincere;* they must be *interior,*—in the will; they must be supernatural; they must be universal and sovereign. It will not profit you to confess your sins or make restitution as the traitor Judas did when he gave back to the high priests the money he had received from them; nor like the wicked king Antiochus, under the natural fear of impending death, to ask pardon of God and promise to repent. Your repentance must be founded on faith; you must hate and detest all your sins without a single exception, because they have offended God, and you must earnestly purpose never more to relapse into them.

But this repentance and conversion can never be the fruit of your own natural strength. You require thereto the preventing and helping grace of God; and that, too, a special, extraordinary, powerful grace, which God is not bound to give to any sinner. He has the most indisputable right to condemn at once to hell him who has committed a mortal sin ; and the grace that converts such a sinner, must be one that enlightens the understanding as to the malice, gravity, and deformity of sin, while, at the same time, it moves and impels the will to a sovereign sorrow and detestation of it. Now, when and where do you expect this extraordinary grace, which comes solely from the great mercy of God, this sudden change and conversion of your whole heart ? Perhaps in your bed, where you waste the morning in unnecessary sleep ? Or in your place of business, where your mind is filled to distraction with worldly cares and concerns ? Or at pleasure parties and idle entertainments ? Or at table, while you are enjoying yourself eating and drinking and indulging your sensuality ? Or even in the house of God, where the precept of the Church compels you to present yourself on Sundays and holydays, if you have still so much fear of the Lord left, and where you hear holy Mass with a cold and distracted heart ? No ; these are neither the places nor the occupations in which the holy Spirit of God will find your heart ready for the influence of this great grace.

True, Almighty God, in whose hand are the hearts of all men, can give that grace in any place, at any time, under any circumstances. Sinners have sometimes been coverted suddenly,unexpectedly, as it were, in a moment; as when Saul was struck blind by a light from heaven, while on his way to imprison and persecute the Christians. Sinners have sometimes been converted by some dismal apparition in the dead of the night, by the fright of a terrible thunderstorm, or the sudden death of a friend. They have occasionally been moved to repentance and amendment of life by great losses or misfortunes, disgraces or sufferings. But, as theologians teach, God does not generally act in this way : a conversion of this sort is a rare, unusual, so to speak, a miraculous event,

which no man can reasonably hope for, or presumptuously desire. Still another means of repentance and conversion for the sinner, is a serious and recollected meditation on the eternal truths, according to the words of God to the prophet Osee; "Behold, I will lead her, the soul, into the wilderness; and I will speak to her heart." That is to say: I will speak to the soul in solitude, and so vividly show her her unhappy state, as to excite her to repentance and contrition. But a means of this kind is not apt to be adopted by a worldling continually distracted with worldly cares, who hardly knows what to meditate on; still less by an habitual sinner who has closed his heart to the voice and invitation of God. Moreover, the very desire or inclination to meditate upon heavenly things, is the first preventing grace that God gives you for your conversion; and, according to the usual course of divine Providence, it is bestowed in a fitting time and place on a heart that is more or less disposed to receive it.

Hence, there is no other means for the sinner but to hear frequently the word of God in sermons. The Holy Ghost speaks to the hearts of men by the living voice of his servants, whom he has commissioned to preach his word. This is the ordinary, and at the same time, the most powerful means of moving the sinner to true repentance and conversion. This is the "two-edged sword," as St. Paul calls it, which penetrates the heart, and pierces it with sorrow for sin: "For the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit." This is the burning fire, as God himself calls it by the prophet Jeremias, which consumes all earthly and wicked desires and inclinations: "Are not my words as a fire? saith the Lord; and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" that is to say, have they not the power to soften, to move to contrition the hardened heart of the habitual sinner? This is that wonderful light which displays before the eyes of the sinner the truths of eternity, and wakens him suddenly, by remorse of conscience, out of the deep sleep of sin, so that at last he surrenders to the irresistible influence of the known truth.

And such has been the experience of many who, through idle curiosity, and while their hearts were still obdurate in evil, happened to hear a single sermon, and went away from it filled with true contrition by an unexpected ray of light from heaven. Palladius writes of a certain man named Moses, who, having been deprived of the office he held at court on account of some great crime he had committed, instead of acknowledging his guilt and trying to amend his life, plunged still deeper into the most enormous crimes, until he became at last the chief of a band of robbers. He happened once to enter a church, not out of piety, but probably with the intention of committing a robbery. Fortunately for him, the sermon had just begun, and the preacher was describing the strict account we shall have to render at the judgment seat, the terrible sentence that shall be passed on the wicked, and the joyful invitation that the children of God shall receive to eternal happiness. After hearing this sermon, Moses became quite another man. Filled with sorrow and weeping bitterly, he left the church, and went to an adjacent monastery, where, having got rid of the heavy burden of his sins, and having received permission to enter the order, he spent the remainder of his life in the greatest mortification and sanctity.

Truly, "the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword;" and if it produces such effects by a single sermon on sinners who go to hear it merely by chance, or through curiosity, and with evil projects actually in their hearts, what may we not expect it to accomplish in those sinners who frequently and regularly hear sermons with a sincere desire to learn something good, and to be moved to repentance? Must they not be softened at last, brought to acknowledge their guilt, and return to God? Oh, well does the envious demon know that, humanly speaking, it is impossible for him to long claim as his slave, the man who sincerely desires to hear the word of God! Hence, he spares no effort to keep men away from sermons; lest through hearing them, they should become pious, and escape out of his clutches. When the time comes for

the sermon, he fills their minds with all kinds of business, which, he persuades them, is of the greatest importance and must be attended to at once; he gets them into talk with others, so that they may be kept at home; he excites wicked people to make fun of the preacher, so that they may not care to hear him; he persuades them that the hour appointed for the sermon is too early and inconvenient; that the weather is too warm or too cold, too damp, too windy, too harsh, and that they would injure their health if they ventured out of doors. But if he cannot keep them away altogether, he at least tries to prevent them from coming in time, so that they may not derive proper fruit from the sermon.

II. Woe to you, O Christian, if you allow the lying spirit to thus deceive you, and prevent you from hearing the word of God! "Never trust thy enemy," is the warning that the Holy Ghost gives us all by the wise *Ecclesiasticus;* and still less should you trust the enemy of your soul, "for as a brass pot, his wickedness rusteth." But you especially, O habitual sinners, do not, for God's sake, allow the tempter to befool you, if you have any hope of saving your soul and going to heaven! I tell you distinctly, that if you do not hear the word of God, there is no other means of conversion and repentance left to you. And further, you may be perfectly convinced that, if you are not moved to repent and amend your life by hearing the word of God, you will never be moved to repentance by any other means, even if God were to work a miracle in your favor, which he will not do. "Yes," says St. John Chrysostom, "even if one were to rise from the dead, or an angel to descend from heaven," to exhort you to repentance and contrition for your sins; not even then would you be induced to do sincere penance, or to be really converted, if the word of God, which is far more impressive and powerful than other means, cannot influence you.

This is what our Lord wishes us to understand by the parable in the Gospel of St. Luke. When the rich glutton, in the midst

of the fearful torments of hell, raised his eyes and beheld Lazarus, whom during life he had despised as less than a dog, reposing in glory in Abraham's bosom, "Ah!" said he, "Father, I beseech thee that thou wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torments." And what answer did Abraham make? "They have Moses and the Prophets," he said, "let them hear them;" meaning, they will preach to them. "No," said the other; "No, Father Abraham; but if one went to them from the dead, they will do penance;" the sight of a ghost would have such an effect on them, that they would amend their lives. No, said Abraham, you are grievously mistaken; if the word of God, which the Prophets preach to them, cannot convert them, much less could a dead man help them; and if your brothers do not care to listen to the prophets, they will have still less inclination to hear one from the dead. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead."

Remember, O sinner (apart from the terrible tortures in store for you hereafter), the very neglect to profit by the word of God is in itself a divine punishment. Hear the threat that God utters by the prophet Jeremias: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: Behold I will send upon them the sword, and the famine, and I will persecute them with the sword and with famine; and I will give them up unto affliction to all the kingdoms of the earth; to be a curse, and an astonishment, and a hissing, and a reproach to all the nations." And why? what have they done? "Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the Lord, which I sent to them by my servants, the Prophets." And what kind of a famine was God to inflict on them? He explains it by the prophet Amos: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord; and I will send forth a famine into the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord." They do not care for my word; they hardly deign to hear it; hence, their punishment shall be that I will deprive them of all inclination and desire to hear it. They are not worthy of that spiritual food; therefore, they

shall perish with hunger, and shall live and die in the unhappy state of sin. Certainly, a most fearful punishment: thus by a hidden decree of God's Providence, his holy word is withdrawn from those who do not deserve to be aroused by grace to amend their lives.

It is a punishment which presages the sinner's eternal damnation in hell. Remarkable is the well-known simile in which Jesus Christ distinguishes between the elect and the reprobate: "And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left." Thus the sheep are a figure of the elect, and the goats of the reprobate. But the prophet David, speaking of sinners, says: "They are laid in hell like sheep; death shall feed upon them." How can that be? If, according to the words of our Lord, the sheep shall be on his right hand at the last day, how can the expression, "They are laid in hell like sheep," be justified? Yet, says St. Augustine, both those texts are true; all who belong to the true Church are sheep of the fold of Jesus Christ, who says of himself, "I am the good Shepherd." All who belong to his fold, are sheep; but all are not elect sheep. But how can we distinguish the elect from the reprobate? They who acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Shepherd, are the elect; "I know mine, and mine know me." They on the other hand, that do not acknowledge him, are reprobate sheep. Our Lord himself says: "My sheep (my elect), hear my voice;" and they will be placed at the Last Day on my right hand. Those who do not hear my voice, my word, are sheep indeed; but they are not *my* sheep; "they are laid in hell like sheep."

Amongst the latter was that unhappy man of whom James de Vitry writes that he could never be persuaded to go to a sermon. "What do I want with sermons?" he would say; "I can preach well enough for myself!" At last he died, and his body was brought to the church to be buried. During the funeral office that, according to the custom of the Catholic Church, was recited for the soul of the deceased man, all who were present suddenly saw to their great consternation, the figure of our Lord on the crucifix, that was placed at the head of the coffin, tear its hands

from the nails, and stop both its ears with them. The priest, seeing this, turned to the people and said to them: "You well know what this means. During his life, this man neglected the word of God, and never went to a sermon, therefore, God now closes his ears, so as not to hear the prayers we are offering for his soul. All is clear enough, that his soul is in hell. There is no use praying for him any more, nor shall his body be buried in consecrated ground! Let it be buried out in the field!" And so it was done.

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," said Christ, speaking of the seed of the word of God. I conclude with the same words, my dear brethren: "He that hath ears to hear," let him be diligent in hearing the word of God; for it is necessary for all men frequently to hear it, if they wish to save their souls. It is necessary for the innocent and the just, that they may be encouraged and strengthened to continue in the divine service, to abstain from sin, and always belong to the number of those chosen sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd. It is especially necessary for those who are actually in the state of sin, that they may be moved to repentance and amendment, if they would not be numbered among the reprobate sheep, who are rejected by the Shepherd, and doomed to hell. Merciful God, save us from that terrible fate! We who are here present all declare that we desire to be together at thy right hand, among thy chosen sheep; and therefore, we have met to-day to hear thy voice, to learn thy law, and to fulfil thy holy will! We thank thee, O God of goodness, that thou hast given to us such frequent opportunities of hearing thy word, in preference to so many others to whom the bread of life is broken but sparingly. We receive that word with the most heartfelt gratitude, and we shall always be ready to follow the light that thou sheddest on us so abundantly. Nothing but absolute necessity shall prevent us from hearing thy warning voice, so that we may, one day, to our great joy, hear thy sweet invitation to eternal bliss: Come, ye blessed of my Father, and follow me into the eternal kingdom. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

HUMAN FRAILTY IN DANGEROUS OCCASIONS.

"*And Jesus also was invited, and his disciples to the wedding.*" John 2: 2.

Truly, that was a happy marriage-feast, at which Jesus, the Son of God, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and the Apostles of our Lord appeared among the guests. Ah, Christians, would that all our social gatherings, conversations, meetings, entertainments, and marriage-festivities were so arranged that we could invite Jesus without scruple to be present at them. But alas! how many there are in such assemblies who cannot hope to have Jesus as their friend and companion. I allude to the danger and occasion of sin. For, be it known to all:

I. That he who does not carefully avoid dangerous company and occasions cannot long remain in the state of grace; and this,

II. Because human weakness, already great enough of itself, becomes still greater in such company and such occasions.

I. If a man runs quickly on icy ground without necessity, and falling breaks his limbs, people are more likely to call him foolhardy, than to pity him. So with a certain kind of company. When occasion is given by it to drunkenness, to opportunities of unjust gain, of anger, quarrelling, fighting, cursing, swearing, calumny, and detraction, to sins against holy purity, bad thoughts, imaginations, and desires, such company is dangerous, and must be most carefully avoided, if we wish to keep Jesus Christ, as our friend and companion. A person of weak and delicate constitution will not expose himself needlessly to danger of contracting a loathsome and highly contagious disorder. A good soldier never actually throws down his weapons of defence, much less deliberately gives them

into the hands of his enemy. Sin should be avoided as a mortal and highly contagious sickness. "The life of man upon earth is a warfare" (Job 7:1). Yes, a continual warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

O my God, who can consider himself safe in the midst of so many foes! The child walking on slippery ice is not as likely to fall as we are to sin, even when all dangers and occasions are far removed from us. True, indeed, are the words of the Apostle, "we have this treasure that is, sanctifying grace, in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4: 7), vessels, which an imprudent step, or sudden fall, may shatter to pieces.

Reflect on Adam in Paradise. In a state of innocence and justice, richly endowed with great graces and perfect knowledge, nevertheless, falling deplorably at a single word from a woman, and that, too, for such a wretched thing as a mouthful of fruit, from which he could easily have abstained in a garden filled with the choicest kind of fruit. Adam, I say, whose flesh was not yet rebellious against the spirit, whose desires were not, like ours, opposed to right reason, and who was yet so weak that he allowed himself to be overcome by a slight temptation! Oh! what great reason have we not to fear and to be on our guard, when we are so weak compared with him, subject to so many violent temptations, even when we do not seek them? And what was it that led Adam to commit such a grievous transgression? It was not so much the desire to taste of the fruit, as the example and persuasion of his wife. For he saw how eagerly Eve had eaten the apple, although she was forbidden to do so under pain of death; he saw, too, that she did not die at once, and when she held out the fruit to him and asked him to taste it, he yielded immediately, and acted without hesitation against the divine command and against his own better lights. Oh! behold the irresistible power of bad example!

King David, too, a man after God's own heart, inflamed with divine love, and a model of perfection, was perverted by a chance look at a woman whom he saw far off, and whom he was not at all seeking; perverted to such an extent, that he rushed headlong

into the most abominable crimes, and for long years forgot his Creator, whom he had formerly loved with his whole heart, and never remembered him till a messenger from heaven opened his eyes!

Had not St. Peter, the prince of the Apostles, sworn that he would rather die than leave his divine Master? Nevertheless, he not only left him, but denied him three times running on oath, not forced thereto by soldiers with drawn swords, nor by a judge threatening him with the stake or the gibbet, but by a few words of a wretched maid-servant. Considering all this, I am forced to cry out in amazement: Alas! poor weak mortals that we are! "he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10: 12). If cedars have fallen, how shall the frail reeds stand before the storm of temptation? If those beautiful stars were extinguished which have shed their light on the world, how easily may not our feeble light be blown out?

And yet, alas! how little people think of the danger! How many Christians there are, even amongst those who are reckoned good and pious, who not only have no fear of bad company, but make an almost daily habit of frequenting it! Persons of both sexes, boys and girls, men and maid-servants, neighbors, men and women, stand and sit, walk, laugh, and joke together, even with the parents' consent, in the one room, or at the door, or in the street, in the evening, till it is quite dark, or else they go for a walk together outside the town, and in the parks and public gardens. Persons of both sexes, married and single, habitually squander away the precious time given them by God for the sole purpose of saving their souls, playing cards, talking, singing, and dancing until late in the night, as if they were made of different materials from other people; as if they had received from heaven a written assurance, confirming them in grace.

And on what, in God's name, do they ground this fancied security? Perhaps, on their firm purpose never to sin against God and holy purity by thoughts or desires, words or deeds? Ah, how wretchedly they deceive themselves! Is there then, no danger

of sin even in thought and desire, in hazardous company ? Why should we, poor mortals, trust so much to our purpose of not offending God when our forefather, Adam, and later, David and Peter, had once the same purpose; yet, when the danger and the occasion came, they, all three, fell most disgracefully. It is one thing to have the purpose of not sinning, and another to carry out that purpose when circumstances conspire to offer a gentle violence to our inclinations and appetites.

The hardest and heaviest piece of iron can be attracted in any direction by the power of the magnet. Did not Henry VIII., king of England, seem to have had a heart of iron, when, surpassing all the other princes of his time in understanding, knowledge, and zeal for the Catholic faith, he wrote so forcibly against the heretics that he received from the Pope the title of "Defender of the Faith "? Who would have imagined that he would have changed so suddenly and so completely; that he would have forgotten the fear of the Lord, have divorced his lawful wife, lived in open adultery, renounced the Catholic faith, which he had before heroically defended, bathed his hands in the blood of Catholics, and brought all England under the cruel yoke of heresy ? Who, I ask, could have foreseen that ? And yet, such was really the case with him. And what was the cause of that terrible change ? The company and familiarity with a woman who was publicly looked on as of doubtful reputation, Anne Boleyn, for whom he entertained an impure passion. Have you ever read in the History of the Church of what such tyrants as Nero, Diocletian, Maximian, Lucinius, and others, did to overcome the constancy of the early Christians ? What were the most powerful weapons by which they succeeded in inducing some to apostatize ? Perhaps the rack,the sword, the spear, the gallows, and the gridirons with which they threatened them ? Ah, no, says St. Cyprian ; no torments were capable of subduing those Christian heroes, who only laughed and mocked at them. What then overcame some unhappy souls ? The flattery and caresses of the women who were sent into their prisons. Lust effected

what neither rack nor torture could do, made them deny Christ and adore false gods. And what must be the consequence when one often seeks company of that kind ? when the desire of seeing this or that person increases more and more ? Finally, what must be the result, if two persons thus attached to each other are in the habit of meeting in secret ?

II. Therefore I repeat my proposition : if we wish to have Jesus Christ as our constant friend and companion, and to keep free from sin, we must most carefully avoid all such dangerous company, unless necessity or the ordinary laws of courtesy sometimes compel us to go into it. Ah ! fly, fly the danger ! as the wise Ecclesiasticus warns us : "Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent ; for if thou comest near them, they will take hold of thee" (Ecclus. 21 : 2). Mark those words ; we must fly sins, not merely as we would the poisonous bite of a serpent ; but we must flee from them as from the very appearance of a serpent. We must keep them as far off from us as possible.

Not without astonishment do we read in Holy Scripture of so many most valiant heroes flying from their enemies in order to avoid a contest with them. We find Jacob flying from his brother Esau ; Moses flying from Pharao ; Elias flying from Jezabel ; Urias flying from Joachim ; David flying from his son Absalom ; David himself flying twelve times from king Saul. In the same way, the Apostle St. Peter takes to flight out of his prison ; St. Paul escapes by means of a basket from the walls ; Jesus Christ, the almighty God, flies from Herod, and he warns his disciples to fly also : "And when they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another" (Matt. 10 : 23). Flight was not a disgrace to these heroes, for they sought honor and glory therein. Certainly David boasted of it more than once, for he indicates, for instance, his third psalm as : "The Psalm of David, when he fled from the face of his son Absalom ;" and the title of the fifty-sixth is : "For David, when he fled from Saul into the cave." So, too, in the spiritual combat we must often take to flight, if we wish to

overcome our enemies and to gain the victory. In every society, or company, or friendly conversation, there is perhaps a cruel Esau, a ferocious Saul, who can easily conquer you. There is perhaps a beautiful Absalom, who can ensnare you in the meshes of his curly locks; there is a tricked-out Jezabel, who can bewitch you by her caresses. Perhaps there is a Herod, who is meditating an attack on your virtue, and has already often made you his prisoner; there may be an Aretas, who tries to inveigle you by his presents and to win your heart. Oh, woe to you, Christian soul, if you come too near to any one of these! If you do not wish to be overcome, you must avoid the combat by flight. Flight alone can save the life of your soul. "O God," says David, "I have declared to thee my life" (Ps. 55 : 8, 9), or, as the Hebrew text has it, "I have declared to thee my flight," I have made known to thee that I took to flight, for to flee from such occasions is equivalent to preserving the life of the soul.

Acknowledge, my dear brethren, I implore you, each by your own sad experience that you have often been overcome in dangerous company and occasions! Should you not, then, be constantly on your guard against them? Ah, how often do you not complain of your inherent weakness and frailty, alleging them as an excuse for your faults and sins? But it is not that weakness that will condemn you at the divine judgment-seat. If your frailty is so great that even when alone, it is only with difficulty you can resist temptations, why, then, lessen the little strength you have, by going needlessly and recklessly, into such company? Ah, in future be more cautious; try to guard your soul. You have but one, and if you lose it, it is lost forever. Let men think and say of you what they please; it is a matter of little importance. If they ask you: Why are you so bashful? Why do you not do as others do? Why do you not go to parties, like others of your age and condition? Answer them, as Demosthenes answered, when asked why he took to flight: "I am saving myself for my country." "I am saving myself for my true fatherland, for paradise," I will say. "Heaven is too dear for me to run the danger of losing it!" If I

deprive myself of dangerous pleasures here below, I shall have the consolation and great happiness of possessing Jesus, my God, as my friend and companion during life ; and after death, I may hope to possess him as my eternal reward in the joyous company of the Saints in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

GOD REFUSES HIS HELP TO THOSE WHO VOLUNTARILY RUSH INTO DANGER.

"*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*" Matt. 8 : 2.

Great was the confidence shown by this leper in the power and goodness of Jesus Christ. He did not complain, as other beggars are wont to do, of his misery ; he did not assail our Lord with importunate cries : "Lord, heal me of my sickness !" but he indirectly declared his firm belief in the almighty power of Christ : "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." He has not a single doubt of our Lord's good will. And moved by the lepers' faith and trust, Christ said to him : "I will ; be thou made clean." With like confidence and faith, my dear brethren, we should make known to God in prayer the necessities of our souls. He is omnipotence itself, and can help us ; he is wisdom itself, and knows our wants ; he is goodness and mercy itself, and he will help us, if we only do our part. I add this last condition, because the trust of many in the divine assistance is not a supernatural confidence, but rather a sinful presumption. Yes, dear Christians, I declare to you without hesitation :

I. That the man who exposes himself without necessity to dangerous occasions, has no right to expect the divine assistance; for,

II. God will deprive him of his help in punishment of his presumption.

I. It is true that even the weakest man is strong enough with the help of God's grace to resist the attacks of all the powers of hell, and to come off victorious in the greatest dangers. And it is also true, that the good God never abandons a man, unless the latter first abandons him ; that he never refuses his help and grace to those who are disposed to receive it, and that he has promised not to forsake us in temptations, according to the words of St. Paul: "God is faithful,who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10 : 13). But mark what the same Apostle says in the same verse : "Let no temptation take hold of you but such as is human" (Ibid.). For you must know that there are two kinds of temptation, one which assails us involuntarily by surprise or chance, and which is called human temptation, and the other, into which one goes willingly and without necessity, and which is called diabolical temptation. To rush, open-eyed, into the danger and occasion of sin is proof of a malice more diabolical than human,—"Give not place to the devil" (Ephes. 4: 27). No man who wilfully and needlessly places himself in the occasion of sin can reasonably hope for the grace of God ; nay, according to the general arrangements of divine Providence, even if one were to ask for grace in such circumstances, it would not be given him. By *grace* I here mean what St. Augustine calls victorious, efficacious grace, that is, the grace by which one really resists his inclinations and overcomes the temptation.

God owes nothing to any one; otherwise the helps he gives would not be graces, which he does not bestow on us according to our will, but according to the decrees of his infinite wisdom, and he gives them when, how, and to whom he pleases. Nowhere do we read that he has promised the special helps of his grace to one who loves and seeks danger. On the contrary, he has declared : "He that loveth danger, shall perish in it" (Ecclus. 3 : 27). And justly so. If a respectable man is overtaken by a misfortune which he could not foresee, there is no one, unless it

be his sworn enemy, but would pity him. But if you see a man, in spite of oft-repeated, friendly warnings, going headlong to ruin, running all sorts of risks in the most reckless manner, and finally going to the bad altogether, oh, (you think), it serves him right! He was warned often enough, and should have known better. You pity the innocent child that is bitten by a dog; but if a naughty boy, who has been provoking the dog, gets bitten, you have no pity for him, and you think he has got what he deserves. Now, if such is the opinion of sensible men in such cases, has not the almighty God still more right on his side to act as he does? Hear what he himself says: "Who will pity a charmer struck by a serpent, or any that come near wild beasts?"(Ecclus. 12 : 13.) A mountebank will caress a living serpent, and put his finger in its mouth, as such people often do on fair-days; but if he is at last bitten by the serpent, so that he dies from the bite, who will pity him? "So it is with him that keepeth company with a wicked man, and is involved in his sins" (Ibid.). For dangerous company and occasions are poisonous adders and cruel serpents; if you go into them without necessity, and frequent them without scruple, and then fall under the assaults of temptation, who will pity you? Who will help you? Almighty God with his extraordinary graces? Oh, no! Spiritual strength is conferred on us to make us careful, not to encourage us to be reckless.

True, David said of God: "He hath given his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up; lest thou dash thy foot against a stone"(Ps.90:11,12). But that protection will be given "in thy ways," not in your headlong rushing into danger. In your ordinary ways; that is, in the occasions that you cannot avoid, and that you must frequent in order to fulfil the duties of your state, although there may be temptations and dangers of evil in them. In those, the Angels will perform their office, and endeavor to protect you from sin; but not in those occasions into which you rush without necessity, for the purpose of gratifying your inordinate appetites, your sensuality, or your impure inclinations. Do you

know the answer that Christ gave the tempter, when the latter brought him up to the pinnacle of the Temple, asking him to throw himself down, to prove the truth of the divine promise, "He hath given his angels charge over thee, etc." ? Our Lord replied to him : "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord, thy God" (Matt. 4 : 7). From this, you may conclude that to expect the special help of grace in dangerous company that one seeks deliberately, or frequents for the sake of amusement, is not confidence in God, but rather presumption,and a tempting of God. "Vain is the hope," says St. Augustine, "that expects to be safe in the midst of allurements to sin." Have you ever heard of any one venturing out to sea in a ship, after the sailors had told him that she was not seaworthy ? Have you ever heard of any one going into a pest-house against the warnings of his neighbors ? God calls out to the reckless soul in unmistakable accents : "Avoid that sinking ship ! Go not near that evil house ! 'he that loveth danger shall perish in it!' " The holy angels call out to it with their good inspirations : "Go back !" The holy Fathers of the Church cry out to it with their exhortations; preachers and confessors implore it in the name of God, to keep away from the danger into which necessity does not compel it to go. All agree in telling it, that such occasions and company are a source of unspeakable danger, that the Evil One lies in wait for it there, that it runs the risk of being infected with a mortal spiritual malady.

II. But that unhappy soul cares nothing for it all. It trusts in the help of God, and hopes that he will keep it free from sin. Let it have its own way. It will soon see how it will end. God will permit it to be cruelly wounded ; nay, perhaps, lose its spiritual life forever. Once for all, "vain is the hope that expects to be safe in the midst of allurements to sin."

If, says St. Bernard, God were prepared to help us with his powerful graces in those dangers which we seek of our own accord, then those holy people whose example we are exhorted to follow have acted imprudently and have given themselves unnec-

essary trouble in separating themselves from the society of men, and living in gloomy solitudes, continually mortifying their senses, in order to avoid the danger of sin. The innocent Job, whose holiness was attested by God himself, made a compact with his eyes, so as not to admit even a thought of a person of the opposite sex: "I made a covenant with my eyes, that I would not so much as think upon a virgin" (Job 31 : 1). St. John Chrysostom cannot sufficiently express his astonishment at this; it seems a strange thing, he says, for such a heroic man, who fought so bravely against the devil, and gained so many victories over him, to fear an innocent maiden and turn his eyes away from her, as if she were more to be dreaded than the evil spirit himself. When he saw the latter approach, he did not fly, but remained, boldly holding his ground and confident that he would be able to overcome him; but he did not dare to remain in the presence of a virgin, and as soon as he saw one approach, he turned his eyes in another direction. "For he thought that in a contest against the demons he should give proof of a manly courage and constancy, but when fighting in the cause of holy purity, that the victory was to be gained, not by seeking, but by avoiding the company of persons of the other sex." St. John the Baptist, who came into the world endowed with sanctifying grace, and who, according to the testimony of our Lord, was the greatest of all born of woman, went into the wilderness in his very childhood. St. Jerome, a man of consummate wisdom, took up his dwelling amongst the wild beasts, beating his breast with a stone, and becoming so emaciated by constant fasts and austerities, that he almost lost the semblance of a human being. This he did, in order to preserve his soul from danger; yet he complains most piteously that, although the sound of the last trumpet was always ringing in his ears, pictures of the dancing-women he had seen at Rome in his youth were constantly coming before his imagination, and tempting him to impure desires. "I," he says, "who was the companion of scorpions and wild beasts, was often present in spirit among the dancing-girls." When Vigilantius asked him why he

did not live like other men, and reproached him with a cowardice unworthy of a great man, in flying into the desert, he answered : "I acknowledge my weakness ;" for, if my eyes happened to rest on a person of the opposite sex, "I might lose the victory." See how the great friends of God take to flight in order not to look on anything dangerous, and how they do not dare to hope for any special help from God if they do not avoid such occasions ; while you, who frequent company of that kind, and spend your time in laughing, joking, and amusing yourself, imagine you have nothing to fear ? You hope to be free from all temptations, and to be able to overcome them if they should assail you, because you rely on the grace of God ? Ah ! vain, deceitful hope !

And if what you urge were true, my brethren, then, indeed, might we all leave our convents and roam about the world at will. Why ? Because, whether alone or in company, whether seeking the danger or avoiding it, we should be always invincible, trusting that the almighty God would always give us his grace, in any case. "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4 : 13), I might say with St. Paul. But I know, too, that the same God abandons all those who go into dangerous company without necessity.

The innocent Dina, daughter of the patriarch Jacob, went out to see the women of the strange land into which she had come : "And Dina, the daughter of Lia, went out to see the women of that country" (Gen. 34 : 1). And her curiosity cost her her maidenly purity. But how is that ? Did not Judith venture into far greater danger, when, decked out in all her beauty, she went into the enemy's camp and spent a whole evening eating, drinking, and feasting with the lustful Holofernes ? Why did God protect her from all danger, and abandon Dina ? He protected Judith because she went into the danger in obedience to a divine inspiration, while Dina was influenced only by a vain curiosity. And what kind of a woman was Judith, in comparison with Dina ? She was a God-fearing widow, who avoided carefully not only every evident danger, but also everything that might remotely tend to

lead her into sin : "She made herself a private chamber in the upper part of her house, in which she abode, shut up with her maids, and she wore hair-cloth upon her loins, and fasted all the days of her life ; she feared the Lord very much, neither was there any one that spoke an ill word of her" (Jud. 8 : 5, 6, 8). What help and protection could not such a holy woman expect in all temptations and dangers from the God whom she loved so much ? Nevertheless, before she went into danger, before, in obedience to the divine inspiration, and for her country's sake, she exposed herself to the temptations of an Assyrian camp, with what prudence did she not make her preparations ? She first reflected deeply as to whether the idea she was about to carry into effect really came from God or not; and although modesty prompted her to say nothing of it to any one, yet she disclosed her design to two ancients of the people, who had authority in the town, with the sole intention of asking their advice, and of finding out whether their opinion agreed with hers as to the divine origin of her inspiration. To this end, she begged of them to pray fervently for light : "So that which I intend to do, prove ye if it be of God, and pray that God may strengthen my design" (Ibid. 31). She often asked them to pray for her : "Let nothing else be done, but to pray for me to the Lord, our God" (Ibid. 33). Before adorning herself she shut herself up, clothed in sack-cloth, with her head covered with ashes, and prostrated herself before the Lord, praying to him long and fervently. When she had finished all her preparations, she prayed as she was going out of the gate of the town ; nay, she spent a great part of the night in the Assyrian camp in watching and prayer. Frequently, she protested that the sole end she aimed at was the honor that would accrue to God, if it could be said, one day, that he had conquered the Assyrians by the hand of a woman. Why should we be surprised, then, if God, who never abandons those who love him with all their hearts and trust in him alone, helped his handmaid and kept her free from dishonor and sin, even in the midst of danger ? In the same way, he protected the innocence of Joseph in Egypt against the caresses

of an impure woman ; and the conjugal chastity of Susanna, he saved from the violence of the two elders ; but none of these dangers were sought voluntarily ; for Joseph ran away, leaving his mantle behind him, while Susanna called for help as well as she could. If Joseph and Susanna had loved the dangerous company, as so many do, nowadays, would they have gained such a glorious victory ? Would they not rather have lost the grace of God, and sinned most shamefully, as a consequence of their foolhardiness ?

We have a still more striking example of this in the New Testament, in the persons of the Apostles, Peter and Paul. Both were, although at different times, in Jerusalem in the same occasion and temptation: Peter, in the court of the high-priest ; Paul, amongst the furious Jews. The question for both of them was whether they would deny Christ, or courageously confess him. Peter declared to his divine Master: "Yea, though I should die with thee, I will not deny thee" (Matt. 26 : 35). Paul said to his disciples: "For I am ready not only to be bound, but to die also in Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21 : 13). But how differently they acted in the hour of trial ! Peter falls most deplorably, and denies his beloved Master three times on oath, while Paul confesses him steadfastly. And why ? Because Peter trusted too much in himself, and deliberately rushed into the occasion, against the express prophecy and warning of our Lord. For what had he to do in the house of the high-priest ? Why did he go into the company of people who were the avowed enemies of Christ ? He should have kept away from them. It was not so with St. Paul. "And now behold," he says, "being bound in the Spirit, I go to Jerusalem" (Ibid. 20 : 22). It is the voice of God, and not my own will, that urges me to go into the midst of the enemies of Christ. If Peter had gone into the house of the high-priest in obedience to a divine inspiration, he would doubtless have been strengthened by a powerful grace, and have avoided that lamentable fall, which he never ceased to deplore afterwards, as long as he lived. If Paul, on the other hand, had

wantonly sought the danger, he would not have fought so valiantly nor gained such a glorious victory. From this, too, my dear brethren, you may conclude that no one can rely on the help of God if he deliberately runs into danger, but can regard it as almost certain, that he will be forsaken by the Lord, and so will fall into sin. Profit, therefore, my brethren, by the warning of the Holy Ghost, and fly, if you wish to avoid sin.

But, you will, perhaps, exclaim: "What are you saying to us about company? It is not unlawful for men and women to meet together, to speak, laugh with, and amuse one another! Common courtesy amongst friends and relations requires that. I was often in company of that kind, but I cannot say that I was anything the worse for it. And you are actually trying to make it sinful!" You are mistaken. I do not say that such meetings are unlawful, nor such associations evidently sinful. I only maintain that, when such company is sought too often and without necessity, there is danger of being led away and of committing sin; for the infallible word of God assures us, that he who loves the danger shall perish in it. They who wish to do everything that is lawful, will easily be brought so far as to do what is unlawful. "If thy right hand scandalize thee," says our Lord, "cut it off and cast it from thee." We must not only cut off the left hand, he says, that is, shun all that is unlawful and sinful; but also the right hand, that is, we must avoid things that are lawful and seem to be harmless, if they can be an occasion of sin to us.

"I have often," you maintain, "been in company of the kind, but I cannot say that it has done me any harm!" Presumption is an unfortunate and a dangerous thing; for it makes many think they have conquered, when in reality they are conquered. I quite believe that the company you speak of did not lead you into the commission of any sinful outward action, but did you do no evil in your heart? And even if that remained pure for the first two or three times, still I tell you to be on your guard against the deceits of the devil. That crafty enemy sometimes acts towards souls as the leopard does with the ape. The leopard is most

eager in pursuit of the ape, because he likes its flesh better than that of any other animal. The ape, however, when it sees its enemy coming, climbs up a tree, where it is in safety. The leopard then has recourse to artifice ; he lies down at the foot of the tree, restrains his breathing as much as possible, and pretends to be dead. When the ape has seen its enemy lie thus apparently lifeless for some hours, it descends and begins to leap and play about him, not suspecting any danger ; but that is the leopard's opportunity, who at once, seizing hold of the ape, devours it. So, I fear it will be with you and the dangerous company into which you are so fond of going. For some time, the devil pretends to be dead. He leaves you in peace, and does not attack you with the least temptation; so that, you really come away without committing sin. But why does he act like that ? Simply to induce you to believe that you are in no danger, so that you may frequent such company again and again, and thus give him an opportunity of assailing you with grievous temptations, and leading you into sin. Therefore I warn you in these words of the Holy Ghost : "Never trust thy enemy: for as a brass pot his wickedness rusteth: though he humbleth himself and go crouching, yet take good heed and beware of him" (Ecclus. 12: 10, 11).

You urge further, perhaps : It is only with respectable people, in fact, with your own friends and relatives, that you associate ? Ah, pretext of respectability ! ah, friendship and relationship ! how many souls you have brought to destruction! Those very things (good as they may seem in themselves), only add to the danger, since they put one off one's guard, encourage greater familiarity, and thus inflame the heart more strongly with the fire of unlawful love. Must we, then (you ask), avoid all friendship and society? No, I do not say that; but you must not seek such company too often, nor make too free in it, especially, if you find your passions excited in it. St. Louis, the son of Charles II. of Naples, once went to visit his mother, the queen, who had not seen him for a long time, and who, therefore, wished to embrace him. "Stop," said St. Louis, "that will not do!"

"But I am your mother," said the queen. "True," he replied, "you are my mother, but you are a woman, and therefore a servant of God must not be too free with you." St. Augustine says that, no matter who they are, persons of the other sex should not be treated with too much freedom: "They who think they can be familiar with women, and yet be victorious, do not know that they are guilty of a twofold sin in the sight of God, inasmuch as they run into danger themselves, and also give a bad example to others of a dangerous familiarity."

By way of conclusion, my dear brethren, I again repeat the words of the Holy Ghost, "Flee from sin as from the face of a serpent" (Ecclus. 21: 2). He who wishes to keep from all sin must imitate the penitent David: "I have hated all wicked ways" (Ps. 118:128). Mark how he says that he hates not merely all sin, but all the ways that lead to it even remotely. God withdraws his grace from the presumptuous, and he who loves danger shall perish in it. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE NECESSITY OF REMOVING THE PROXIMATE OCCASION OF SIN.

"*Lord save us, we perish.*" Matt. 8: 25.

"Lord, save us: we perish!" The disciples of Christ could offer this prayer with the greatest confidence of being heard and saved. They were in imminent danger, but they had followed their divine Master into the ship, and had him with them as their Protector. If they had noticed beforehand the stormy state of the sea, and had nevertheless obstinately determined to trust themselves to it, without the protecting presence of the Lord, what would they have had to expect, if not shipwreck? In the same way, my dear brethren, they who, without absolute necessity, venture into all sorts of dangerous occasions and company, desire, hope for, and expect in vain the help of God. If this holds

good of merely remote occasions of sin, what shall we say of the proximate occasions? Certainly, my friends, if you wish to escape mortal sin and eternal ruin, you must

I. Avoid those companions who are a proximate occasion of sin to you, and

II. You must avoid them for all time.

I. That we may not be groping in the dark, we must first try to find out what is the proximate occasion of sin. It is nothing else but a danger into which, if one runs, or remains, he, generally speaking, falls into sin, whether in thought or desire, in words or conversation, in deed or action. Here each one must consider his own nature and weakness, his desires and inclinations, and his past experience; for the same circumstance that may be the proximate occasion of sin to one, is not so to another. For instance, I know by experience that, whenever I go to a certain house, I sin against holy purity; or else that, out of ten times, for example, that I have been there, I have sinned seven or eight times. That house, as long as the same people live in it, is the proximate occasion of sin to me. In the same way, you are in the habit of consenting to an unchaste desire when you look at a certain person of the opposite sex, or at a picture that is not sufficiently decent; a deliberate look at that person or that picture is the proximate occasion of sin for you. Another, when in company with certain friends of his, is wont to indulge in impure discourse and to take a sinful pleasure in it; those companions are for him the proximite occasion of sin. Another is living in a house where he constantly sees a person for whom he has an impure attachment, so that he, generally speaking, whenever he sees that person, consents to unlawful desires and thoughts, or actually commits some sinful action; to remain in that house is for him the proximate occasion of sin. Another knows from experience that, when he takes too much to drink, although he may not actually get drunk he is wont to commit sins of impurity, or to be quarrelsome; that drink is to him the proximate occasion of sin. A

young person of the opposite sex knows by experience that, if she spends her time in the evenings standing at the door, she is likely to meet with some companion of the neighborhood, who will lead her into sin ; that habit is for her the proximate occasion of sin. And so on for other circumstances.

Now, I repeat, he who is not firmly resolved to shun such an occasion once for all, or, if he is actually in it, to give it up completely, cannot be saved from eternal ruin, no matter how often he goes to confession or holy Communion. He is and remains in the state of sin. Why so ? Because, even if his going into such an occasion, or his remaining in it, should not be the cause of sin to him now and then, yet it is in itself a sin which God has forbidden under pain of eternal damnation. For he who forbids the end, forbids also the means that must of necessity lead to that end ; and he who forbids me to commit sin forbids me also to have anything to do with that which, humanly speaking, necessarily brings sin along with it, in short, with the proximate occasion.

In the very beginning, God forbade our forefather, Adam, to eat the fruit of the tree that was in the middle of Paradise : "Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death" (Gen. 2 : 17). Did he, then, forbid only the eating of the fruit ? So it would appear if we consider the words of the commandment ; but hear the answer that Eve gave to the serpent afterwards, when he asked her why she did not enjoy such beautiful fruit : "Of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of paradise, God hath commanded us that we should not eat ; and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die" (Ibid. 3 : 3). Mark those words, we must not even "*touch*" the fruit. Its very touch, the sight of its pleasing colors, its agreeable smell, were so enticing, that we could not refrain from eating it. Such was Eve's line of argument, and she concluded, therefore, God has forbidden us not merely to eat of the fruit, but even to touch it.

God's commandment to the Israelites was attended with like limitations. He forbade them to adore false gods, and in order

to remove every dangerous occasion out of their way, he commanded them at the same time to burn all their graven images : "Their graven things, thou shalt burn with fire" (Deut. 7 : 25). They were not to keep any of these things in their houses, or even to desire the silver and gold of which they were made : He had commanded them not to eat leavened bread on Easter, and therefore, they were obliged to throw away all such bread out of their houses during the Paschal time. The Nazarenes were not allowed to drink wine, and had consequently to abstain from eating fresh or dried grapes, lest the taste of the fruit should entice them to taste the wine also. With still greater care, says St. John Chrysostom, did our Lord, in the law of grace, endeavor to cut off the occasions that might lead us to transgress his commands. He tells us in the Gospel of St. Matthew that, "Whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment. and whosoever shall say : Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. 5 : 22). But why so severe, O Lord ? That no occasion may be given to violate the fifth commandment : "Thou shalt not kill." For if it were lawful to vent one's anger against another, to abuse and vilify him, there would be the greatest danger of coming to blows, and even murder, in the end. The only confirmation of your speech shall be, yes or no ; never shall you swear unless compelled thereto by absolute necessity. Why ? That you may have no occasion to violate that other commandment : "Thou shalt not bear false witness."

But with regard to the commandment forbidding adultery and other sins of impurity, to which our miserable nature is so inclined, oh, how careful Christ was ! He has closed our eyes, ears, mouths, hearts, and minds against this vice, and forbidden us, under pain of sin, to look at, listen to, speak or think of, voluntarily, anything impure, to look at a person of the opposite sex with desire, or even to mention the vice : "All uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you" (Ephes. 5 : 3), as St. Paul says. He has forbidden us, under pain of sin, to hang up anything on the walls of our rooms, or to allow anything to appear

in our dress or outward behavior, which might be suggestive of impure ideas. He has commanded us, under pain of sin, to give up the friendship and society of those who are apt to lead us into this vice, no matter how dear they are to us, or how useful or necessary we find them; for such is the meaning of those well-known words in the Gospel: "If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee" (Matt. 13:9); that is, if a person who is dear to you as the apple of your eye is the occasion of sin to you, away with him at once. "And if thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee" (Ibid. 8): that is, if you gain more by visiting that house than you could by the work of your hands, and if that house is the occasion of sin to you, you must avoid it altogether. If the society of that person is so necessary to your comfort and well-being, that you can as illy spare it as your foot, being an occasion of sin to you, you must leave that person once for all.

Mark, my dear brethren, how exact the command is. Christ does not say: "If thy eye scandalize thee," close it, so as not to see anything with it, but "pluck it out." He does not say: "If thy hand or foot scandalize thee," tie it up, so that it cannot move; but, "cut it off." Hence it is not enough for the fulfilment of this law for one to say, I will go to that house, or into that company, or to see that person; but I will guard my heart and my senses so as not to fall into sin. No; that is not the way to pluck out the eye, or to cut off the hand or foot. The occasion has to be completely avoided. Our Lord not only says: "Pluck it out"—"cut it off,"—but "*cast it from thee.*" We must throw away the eye, hand, or foot, without any desire to take it back again. If I break off all intimacy with that evil companion, may I not continue to salute her now and then; to speak with her alone, to write to her occasionally to show that I bear her no hatred? No; even that much is dangerous and would be the occasion of unlawful thoughts and desires. Pluck out the eye, and cast it from thee. You must be as much separated from that person as if you did not know her at all, so that you will have neither the wish nor

the power of renewing your intimacy with her. "It is better for thee having one eye to enter into life, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (Matt. 18 : 9).

A man must sacrifice even a great pleasure, or honor, or wealth, rather than enter a house, go into company, or associate with a person who places him in the proximate danger of sin. Nay, there are many who maintain that, if necessary, one should sacrifice in such circumstances all one's wealth, honor, and good name, and even life itself, because we must be always prepared to renounce everything, rather than offend God by grievous sin.

II. People sometimes say : "I cannot yet leave that house, that person, that company ; I will go on as usual, but, with the help of God, I will avoid sin !" No matter whether you commit sin or not, you are still guilty in the sight of God, inasmuch as he has forbidden, not only the sinful act, but also the occasion of it. And what is the good of saying: "I will go into the occasion, but by the help of divine grace, I will not commit sin any more?" You might as well say, I will go out at night and leave my door open, trusting to Providence that no thieves will enter my house. I will put my head into the jaws of a raging lion, trusting that God will prevent him from devouring me. I will not give up drinking, but I hope that God will not allow me to get drunk. I will run into the midst of bullets and swords, but, with the help of God, I will not get wounded ; I will stand in the middle of a fire, but I hope that God will prevent me from being burned. What foolish talk this is ! How many youths were there who came uninjured out of the furnaces of Babylon ? The holy Scripture mentions only *three* ; but now it seems that you will be the fourth ; for as St. John Chrysostom says, it is as great a miracle for one not to fall into sin, especially in the matter of impurity, when he goes into the occasion of it, as for the three Hebrew youths to have come out of the fire unharmed. Do you think that God will work a miracle to please you, if you wantonly rush into the danger ? I take to witness your own experience. How often

have you not made the same promise, and sworn almost in the confessional, that you would be careful, with the grace of God, not to fall into sin? And up to the present, that promise has remained unfulfilled. Does not your own conscience tell you that, whenever you went to that person, that company, or that house, you came away with another sin on your soul? In vain, therefore, under those circumstances, do you renew your promises. You sin by your very presumption in remaining in, or wilfully seeking the danger.

How little then can one depend on one's ordinary confessions and absolutions, so long as he continues in the occasion of sin. Many say: "True, that I commit sin generally when I go to that house, or into that company, or to see that person, but I go to confession immediately after, and receive absolution. The priest says nothing to me about the matter, and I must give him credit for knowing his business," etc. "A fine confession, that!" says St. Ambrose, "a wonderful absolution! Those people are like one who tries to wash himself with an unburnt brick: the more he wets it, and rubs himself with it, the dirtier he becomes." What better are you for going often to confession, if you continue in the proximate occasion of sin? Instead of cleansing your soul, you only soil it still more by a sacrilegious confession and Communion; for without an earnest purpose to avoid the occasion of sin, you can have neither true sorrow nor resolution of amendment. You do not act honestly with God and your soul; you run from one confessor to another, who does not know the state of your conscience, or you seek one who will not question you much, and to him you tell the sins you have committed since your last confession, but nothing more. You say nothing of the fact that you are in the habit of committing those sins for a long time because you are in the proximate occasion of them, and *that* you are bound to tell. Thus, in an underhand manner, you steal an absolution from a confessor who has no suspicion of how matters really stand with you; but it is an absolution that will do you no good, for it will be written down against you in the

great account book, and will only increase your torments in hell. One day, you will find out that your conversion was only a sham, coming from a false and iniquitous heart.

If the confessor knows that you are in the proximate occasion of sin, and are not firmly resolved to renounce it forever, he cannot give you absolution. Nay, if you have often promised him to avoid it, and have not fulfilled your promise, he dare not in the end absolve you from your sins, unless you have really left the sinful occasion; nor must he trust any farther to your mere promise, even if you confirm it with an oath. If, in spite of that, he gives you absolution, then, either he does not know his duty, or else he commits a sin with you, by trying to make a peace between you and God, "which is a vain and false peace, injurious to him who gives it, and in no way profitable to him who receives it." It is a favor which condemns the judge, and does not acquit the accused. You must know that, although you may have received absolution a hundred times in that way, if you wish afterwards to do sincere penance and be really converted to God, you must tell in confession all the mortal sins you committed during the whole time you were in the occasion of sin, as well as the number of times you made sacrilegious confessions and Communions. You must repeat all those confessions with true sorrow, because the past absolutions were null and void, because you lacked true sorrow and purpose of amendment.

In conclusion, my dear brethren, let me exhort you in the words of Samuel to the Israelites, "If you turn to the Lord with all your heart, put away the strange gods from among you" (1 Kings 7 : 3). Do you wish, O sinners, to free yourselves from the state of sin, to be reconciled to God, and to enjoy the peace and repose of a good conscience? "Put away the strange gods," remove every occasion of sin at once, no matter what it costs you. Away with it! It is better for you to go to heaven without your dear friend, than to go to hell with him or her. If it were to reduce you to beggary, the person must go. No matter what happens, if it were the loss of life itself, it must be done at once.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

VAIN EXCUSES AS TO THE PROXIMATE OCCASION.

"*An enemy hath done this.*" Matt. 13: 28.

"A man's enemies shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:36), says our Lord. This is especially the case with those who are the proximate occasion of sin to us, above all in the matter of impurity. Oh, what a multitude of sins are caused by such an occasion. He who is once entangled in it has his soul sowed like a field with all sorts of weeds of carnal thoughts, desires, words, and works. If he asks: "Who has done this?"—his own conscience will answer him: "An enemy hath done this,"—it is the work of that person, that house, that company, that proximate occasion. But, O blindness and stupidity of man! He who is once entangled in an occasion of this kind loves nothing more than the enemies of his soul; he tries to deceive himself in all sorts of ways; he has all sorts of false arguments to prove that he is not bound to remove or avoid a certain proximate occasion of sin,

I. Because it is not a proximate occasion for him; or,
II. Because in future it will not be so dangerous for him.

I. Some who try to persuade themselves that this or that occasion is not a proximate one of sin to them, plead with their confessor by way of excuse: I keep that woman in my house, not for the purpose of committing sin and offending God, but because she is useful or necessary to me in the management of my domestic affairs. I go to that house, or into that company, not to commit sin, but to visit my friends, according to the requirements of courtesy, or to pass away the time in lawful amusements. In looking at or speaking to that person, who is pleasing to me, I seek nothing but such a delight as one experiences in eating and drinking, in looking at a play, or in listening to good music. That is

all I want. I do not seek carnal or forbidden pleasure, and if I feel it, it is against my will and intention. I protest that I never will voluntarily seek such pleasure, for I do not wish to offend God by a mortal sin, etc.

What wretched excuses are these! I thought that the deceit that Satan practised in Paradise, and that has since produced such lamentable fruit in the world, was detested by all, but now I am forced to believe the words of the philosopher Seneca: "In what do we rejoice more than in deceit?" It seems, indeed, that the more crafty and cunning our deceit, the more we love it. This deplorable self-inflicted blindness is the most terrible punishment that God permits our sins to bring upon us in this life.

What, in the name of wonder, is the meaning of your excuse? "I will keep in my house or, I will go to visit the person who pleases me, but not with the intention of committing sin and offending God?" Where is the sinner in the world so wicked, what robber or murderer is so abandoned, as to sin only for the purpose of offending God? Ask the thief: "Why did you steal?" He replies: "To get money, needful for my support." Ask the assassin: "Why did you kill that man?" "To have revenge on him." Ask the libertine: "Why did you commit adultery?" "To satisfy my passion." Not one of these will acknowledge that his object was to offend God. To sin merely for the purpose of sinning, and through hatred to God, belongs rather to demons in hell than to men upon earth. It is nonsense, to appeal to your intention. The fact speaks louder than your intention. Suppose I set fire to your house, and then reply to your just complaints: "Oh, I did not mean to do you any harm, nothing was farther from my intention. I only wished to see the fire and to warm myself at it!" What would you think of that? He who wills the cause, you answer, wills also the effect. Therefore, *I* answer that occasion is a proximate one for you, and you are not allowed either to go into it, or to remain in it, and no matter what it costs you, it must be removed.

Another, apparently more reasonable than the first, says: "That house, person, or company has hitherto been a proximate

occasion of sin for me ; but I have never had such a clear knowledge of the malice of sin as I now have. I have just confessed my sins with such a lively sorrow, and such a firm resolution,that I feel I would bear all the evils in the world, and die a thousand times rather than commit another mortal sin. In fact, I have no longer any desire or inclination for carnal pleasures. I am fully persuaded that I run no danger now by keeping that person in my house, or by going into that company, in order to satisfy the requirements of friendship, as the law of Christian charity commands." What a sudden change has come over you ! It may be as you say, and if it is, you ought to rejoice and to thank God from the bottom of your heart. But let me give you one piece of advice : do not trust too much to your good resolutions, nor venture again on the strength of them into the occasion of sin, or you will certainly fall.

Have you done penance ? have you repented of your sins and blotted them out ? If so, I congratulate you with all my heart. What are you now,stone or iron ? No; you are and remain straw, as you were before. Can you, then, touch fire and not be burnt ? Again: here is a lighted candle ; blow it out, but immediately hold it to another lighted one, and, even before the wick touches the flame, it will take fire. So it is also with the proximate occasion of sin, especially in the matter of impurity. No knowledge on the part of the understanding, no purpose or resolution on the part of the will, is of any use. You have detested your sins from the bottom of your heart, and are firmly determined rather to die a thousand times than to commit them again. The candle is blown out ; the fire of concupiscence is somewhat subdued ; but if you go again into the proximate occasion, the former impure love will be awakened in you anew, the fire of impurity will burst forth into a flame. The fire of carnal desire is turned,as it were, into tears of penance ; but if you go again into that evil house or company,the water will soon be reconverted into a fire which will consume your soul worse than before.

St. Paul warns us : "Give not place to the devil" (Ephes.

4: 27). Even the place in which one has sinned becomes dangerous, since the mind recalls what occurred there, and thus awakens guilty desires anew. Much more, then, will the actual, living presence of the partner of one's sin have that effect. "Adam, where art thou?" (Gen. 3: 9) questioned the Lord after Adam's sin. "In the garden." Away with you at once; the very place is dangerous for you. If you look again at the forbidden tree, the desire to eat of its fruit will again master you: "And the Lord God sent him out of the paradise of pleasure" (Ibid. 23), and placed an angel with a fiery sword at the entrance, so that he might never return to the place where he had sinned. O sinner! since you now acknowledge your guilt and repent of it, let me ask you: "Where art thou?" Where do you intend to remain for some time to come? In the house where that person is still living? In the house or company where you will often meet with that person? Ah, that is no place for you! You must never go there any more. Its entrance must be closed to you, or else the old Adam will get possession of you again.

You say that you do not feel any temptation any longer, and that all sinful desire seems to have left you. If that is the case, why are you so anxious to see that person again? Why are you so troubled when he or she is absent? Why do you find it so difficult to break off that intimacy? That is an evident, unmistakable sign that you have still something left to fight against in secret, and that the sinful desire has not entirely abandoned you. If you really feel no temptation any more, then one of three things must be true: either the devil does not know you any longer, or knowing he is sure of you, takes no further trouble about you. The house-dog does not bark at his master or friends, but only at strangers. The devil is preparing some trap to ensnare you, or he refrains from tempting you for a time, only that he may the more surely bring you in the end to destruction.

The Norman prince, Hastings, having long unsuccessfully besieged the Italian town, Luna, at last, commanded all hostilities to cease, and caused the rumor to be spread about that he, the gen-

eral in chief of the besieging army, had suddenly taken ill and died. The news of his supposed death was brought to the citizens by an envoy, who made known to them at the same time the last will of the prince, namely, that his body should be carried in state to the cathedral of the town, to which he left a rich legacy, and be there buried. The citizens believed the story, and that, all the more readily, as hostilities had ceased for such a considerable time. Hastings, seemingly a corpse, was borne into the town, accompanied by a number of courtiers and officers, and some thousands of soldiers bearing lighted torches. While the citizens were admiring the spectacle, the prince suddenly opened his coffin, and, to their greatest astonishment, leaped out into the midst of his men, who were all well armed. He was thus enabled to take possession of the unguarded gates, and allowing his army to enter, reduced the unfortunate town to subjection. O, repentant sinner! keep the gate fast closed against your enemy. He may pretend to be dead; he may leave you for a time in peace; but if you once admit the proximate occasion within your walls, he will suddenly surprise you, fan into a more violent flame than ever the sinful desires that seemed to you to be quite extinguished, and thus make sure of bringing you to eternal ruin.

O no! "If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee." No matter how great the change you think has come over you, pluck out the eye that has hitherto been the occasion of sin to you, and throw it far away from you. Even supposing there were no danger of your committing sin in the company of that person, how do you know that there is none for the other person? The latter you certainly place in the proximate occasion of impure thoughts and desires by your presence or conversation. Nor will I say anything now of the scandal you give the whole neighborhood, who are, perhaps, aware of the unlawful intercourse you have been maintaining. Therefore I repeat that it is not lawful for you to remain in such an occasion, nor to seek it again. You are bound, under pain of grievous sin, to remove it altogether, and to avoid it completely.

"But at all events, Father," urges another presumptuous soul: "Let me go to that person once more and represent the dangerous state in which we have both been living, so that by fraternal correction I may perhaps induce him or her to do penance as I do. Thus, we may change our former unlawful love into a holy friendship, which will not hurt us. Otherwise, that poor soul will continue in the state of sin and be lost forever!" What a pious zeal for souls you have all of a sudden! I imagine the devil laughs heartily at your devotion. Do you think you can convert souls by your presence and conversation, and save them from the jaws of the hellish wolf, although it is only very recently and with great trouble that you have succeeded in escaping him yourself? You presume to attempt the conversion of a lustful soul by presenting to her the object of her passion, that is, yourself. You wish to preach penance to a soul who has so perverted you, that because of her you have often given yourself over to the devil and to the eternal flames of hell?

"Recover thy neighbor," says the Holy Ghost, it is true, but hear what he adds immediately after: "recover thy neighbor according to thy power, and take heed to thyself that thou fall not" (Ecclus. 29 : 27); that is: Do not attempt anything beyond your strength, and be careful that in trying to help another, you do not injure yourself. If a heavy weight is placed on a newly-built wall, the plaster of which is not yet dried, it will fall down. You are only newly-converted yet you charge yourself with the burden of converting a soul, and that, too, in such circumstances and by such means as God has strictly forbidden. Which is the more likely, that a man in good health will give strength to a sick man by his company, or that the sick man will infect him who is in good health? The latter is more likely, and is generally the case, when there is question of a contagious illness.

No, no; in such circumstances, there is no safety unless in flight. If you wish to convert the person with whom you have sinned, then, the only advice I can give you is to do it "not in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth;" not with exhorta-

tion and advice, nor even by letter, but in deed and in truth, that is, by good example. Keep away from that person. Do not take any notice of her if she should salute you, or send messages to you by others. Send back her letters unopened. Shut your door in her face, and act towards her as if she were your mortal enemy. Then she may perhaps enter into herself, and say: That man is evidently quite changed; it is clear that he is really converted. I must follow his example. If she does not follow it, then, at all events, you have done what God requires of you, and have placed your soul in safety. In a word, without attempting to frame excuses, "flee from sins as from the face of a serpent" (Ecclus. 21: 2). Dread the occasion of sin, as you would a venomous reptile. Why does God not tell us to fly sin as a raging lion or tiger, for such animals could do us more harm than a mere crawling reptile? Those animals, although cruel and dangerous, are not to be feared at all times. While they are young, one can play with them without running any risk; nay, they may be tamed so that they run after the person who feeds them, as if they were faithful dogs. On the other hand, serpents are always to be feared; they can never be tamed, and whether they are young or old, they can always kill a man, if they but touch him with their poisonous fangs. Therefore, you must avoid the occasion of sin as you would a serpent. If you do not wish to lose your soul, there is nothing else for you but flight. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ON THE TORMENT CAUSED BY A BAD CONSCIENCE.

"*Grace be to you, and peace.*" 1 Thess. 2: 10.

Yes, peace! But there is no peace, where there is a domestic war and torture; whose business it is to torment sinners day and night, namely their bad consciences. O sinners, if you are not sunk in the lowest depths of wickedness, you must know by your own

experience what a cruel tormentor a bad conscience is? And are you not foolish, then, to remain in the unhappy state of sin, or to make a deliberate choice of that state by committing sin? For if you fear neither death, nor hell, nor any other punishment, at least the uneasiness and torment of your own consciences should frighten you. And it is a torment which has not its equal on earth, as I shall now show by way of salutary warning to you, and I say:

I. A bad conscience tortures the soul most keenly, by continually upbraiding her with her sins.

II. A bad conscience tortures the soul most keenly by continually threatening her with eternal damnation on account of her sins.

I. There is no doubt that it causes most exquisite torture to be upbraided with what one is deeply ashamed of, and tries to hide in every possible way. But the torture is still worse when one cannot deny or excuse one's self for that which causes his shame, and when the accuser is a person of high authority, against whom no defence is possible, so that the only thing to do is to hang one's head in utter confusion. But the worst of all is, when the upbraiding is kept up for a long time, with bitter words and sarcastic laughter, and that under such circumstances the person upbraided is compelled to stand by and listen; this, I say, is so great a torture, that any honorable man would prefer to be beaten black and blue, rather than undergo it. Is it not so, my dear brethren? Some one says in company (and generally speaking, slanderous and uncharitable remarks about the faults of others form the staple of conversation): I know a certain person in town, whose name I will not mention, although he is well enough known, who has made a good deal of money in a rather unjust manner. What a shame for him! The man has no conscience, etc. I know one who is very frequent in his visits to such and such a person; it is easy to guess what he is after; he is a source of

scandal to the whole neighborhood, etc. Now if, during a conversation of this kind, any one happens to be present who is addicted to any of those vices, and thinks that the remarks are intended for himself, how ashamed he must feel! He gets red and pale alternately, and wishes he were a hundred miles away from the place, although the person speaking may not even have thought of him. How much greater would not his shame and confusion be, if the uncharitable remarks were pointedly directed at him!

Imagine the state of Aman at the banquet given by Queen Esther to Assuerus. When they had eaten and drunk enough, Esther, at the king's command, made her request: "Give me my life for which I ask, and my people, for which I request;" for I and my people are to be slain. And, what is still worse, our enemy is in such a position that, acting as he does in the king's name, his cruelty will be ascribed to the king. Consider now, my dear brethren, what must have been the state of Aman's mind on hearing himself accused so unexpectedly. The king, wroth at what he heard, asked: "Who is this, and of what power, that he should do these things?" The question was like a thunderbolt to Aman. But Esther answered: "It is this Aman that is our adversary and most wicked enemy." How great must have been the confusion of Aman at hearing this answer! "Aman," says the Scripture, "hearing this, was forthwith astonished, not being able to bear the countenance of the king and of the queen." Full of fear and shame and hardly conscious of what he was doing, he threw himself before Esther's couch, and would, no doubt, have rejoiced if he could have died on the spot. So intolerable is the torment caused by being upbraided with one's own shame (Esther 7 : 5, 6).

Nearly every day, O sinner, you have to bear a similar torment, after having mortally offended your God, unless, indeed, you are one of those who are sunk in the very depths of depravity, and have become callous and obdurate. If you are not gone so far as that, then you will have torture and punishment enough to bear.

You have within you, in your bad conscience, a devil that is by no means dumb ; or, to speak better, your conscience is the devil that tortures you, by continually reproaching you with your shame in the bitterest terms ; nor can you hear those reproaches without heartfelt anguish and confusion ; and yet you are compelled to listen to them against your will. The moment you satisfy your brutal lusts, or your inordinate inclinations, and commit a sin, the tormenting demon is, as you must acknowledge, already there, and he calls out to you, as Pilate did to Christ, "what hast thou done?" Miserable mortal, where are you going to? Whither have your blind desires led you? Shame upon you! If any honorable man knew what you have done, you would be covered with confusion! And yet the Almighty God has seen you while you were actually insulting him,and trampling under foot his precious Blood. Is that your gratitude to him for the countless gifts and graces he has bestowed on you? And what better are you now for what you have done, poor wretch that you are? And what has become of your soul? It is sold to the devil for a vile and momentary pleasure, for a worthless thing! How dare you lift up your eyes to heaven any more? What has become of the merits of your former good works? You have lost them all in a moment. Where are now your so oft-repeated protestations that you would rather die than offend God by mortal sin? How the devil must laugh at you, now that he has so easily ensnared you! Where is now your devotion to, your confidence in, the Mother of God? How can you dare to call her your Mother, after having so wickedly driven her most beloved Son out of your heart? Such are the bitter reproaches of your conscience when you have committed a sin. And that is according to what God said to Cain : "If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? But if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door?"

And what have you to say by way of defence? You cannot deny what you are accused of ; your conscience brings it clearly before you ; whether you will or not, you must acknowledge your guilt. In vain do you try to cloak your wickedness, or to allege false

excuses for your sin. You may deceive men by them, but not yourself, your conscience speaks out plainly and distinctly ; it cannot be deceived by flattery ; and therefore you must hear it in silence, and bear your shame as best you can. You think perhaps, my sin was committed in secret, no one knows anything of it but myself and my associate in guilt, and I am certain that it will never be revealed, so that I can appear before men just as good as I was before, and they will have the same good opinion of me. True it is that, when you do wrong, you do not call in witnesses ; and impurity, theft, and other shameful crimes are committed in the darkness of the night, and in hidden holes and corners, and are concealed from the eyes of men by a hypocritical appearance of piety; but tell me, "If you have no other witness of your sin, have you not the testimony of your own conscience?" If no man knows of your guilt, it is known, at all events, to God and to yourself, and that is enough to cause you to be tortured by the pangs of remorse. If men, angels, demons, nay, even God himself, were to leave you in peace, you have within you a torturer whose bitter reproaches you must bear to your great confusion; and it is in that especially that the torment of a bad conscience consists, namely, that it annoys and troubles you alone and in secret.

Nay, the fact that you dare not make known your trouble to others, rather increases, than lessens it. Every one who is afflicted seeks consolation from his friends and acquaintances, and relates to them in detail all that he has to suffer, and he is able to bear his trials far more courageously when he is aware that others sympathize with him. The bitterest trial of all is the secret of which one dares not complain, and which he must bear alone and unsupported. Thus it often happens that a man appears outwardly with a smiling countenance, while in the depths of his heart he is consumed with anguish. And so it is in reality with the sinner who is tortured by a bad conscience. Shame prevents him from making known his sufferings to any one. That others have a good opinion of him, instead of lessening, rather increases his

torment ; for his conscience continually cries out to him: See, men look upon you as good and pious, and you are in reality a slave of the devil! What must God think of you ?

And how are you to get rid of those importunate upbraidings ? Will you run away from them? But whither can you go? No matter where you are, or what you do, you have your conscience, that is your tormenting demon, always with you. Nor can you induce it to be still ; for conscience is,so to speak, without shame; it cannot be persuaded by flattery, or bribed by gifts ; it is insensible to kind, as well as to harsh words, and it persists in doing the office entrusted to it by God, namely, exhorting and tormenting the sinner. It is a thorn in his side, which causes acute pain, that no ointment, or medicine can allay until the thorn is pulled out. In vain do you keep away from sermons, lest you should hear some allusion to your secret vices; and it generally is the case that they who have a bad conscience are very negligent in hearing the word of God, especially when they have reason to suspect that the truth will be told them; but I say, it is no use for you to try to save yourself in that way, for at home, in your own room, you have a preacher who tells you the truth about your sins better than any one else, and that preacher is your own conscience,which reproaches you with your wickedness all the more bitterly because you try to avoid hearing what it has to say. When the bell rings for the sermon,your conscience says to you,Unhappy man that you are! You have gone so far now, that you dare not hear the word of God, which used to strengthen and comfort you in the divine service. In fact, do what you will, you cannot avoid the pangs of remorse, and at last you will be obliged, if you wish to get any rest at all, to make known your shame and your sin.

How many plans the sinner resorts to, in order to free himself from the heavy and loathsome burden of his own conscience! But all to no purpose. He goes into company in order to divert his mind from its troubles ; he tries to steal away the time, as it were, from his cares and to conceal his anguish from the eyes of

men by all kinds of amusements, feasting, and dancing; but in vain midst of his pleasures his smiling countenance, his outward gayety, are only a cloak to hide the trouble and uneasiness that are gnawing at his heart,which is groaning and sighing under a heavy burden. Sometimes the sinner thinks that he will silence the voice of conscience, and get rid of his trouble by putting off his confession for months and years, or, what is still worse, by concealing in confession the shameful sin that causes him remorse; but he only makes matters worse; for the burden becomes heavier on account of the additional guilt of sacrilege. He then tries another plan, and imagines that outward acts of devotion, or long prayers, or almsgiving will quiet his uneasy conscience; but here too he is mistaken, and his remorse is only increased, for he is continually reminded that his prayers and devotions are not sincere, since he has not honestly made his peace with God. No matter what efforts he may make otherwise to find peace, he will at last be forced to disclose his own shame, to make known his sins in confession, and penitently and humbly to beg pardon for it. If he refuses to do that, he will never be freed from his torments.

How painful it must be for a soul to be thus perpetually tortured! According to the wise man, "It is better to dwell in a wilderness, than with a quarrelsome and passionate woman;" and I can easily imagine that such is the case; but is it not a still more unbearable torment to have to dwell with a bad conscience, that is always reproaching you? O sinner! are you not really mad and out of your senses to expose yourself to such lasting and intolerable torture, and to forfeit the grace and friendship of God for the sake of some momentary pleasure, or trifling gain, or short-lived gratification of your evil desires? O man, who know very well how sin plagues and torments you and gnaws at your heart, how can you so readily and even laughingly swallow down the forbidden morsel that you know will cause you such suffering, for the sake of a momentary pleasure? whom have you to blame but yourself? And, indeed, according to the philosopher Seneca, you richly deserve the punishment you have brought on yourself.

"The first and greatest punishment of the sinner is sin, nor does any crime go unpunished, for every crime is its own punishment," since it is always reproaching the sinner. But the torment of a bad conscience does not end here, for,besides its bitter upbraiding, it threatens the sinner with eternal damnation as his final destiny.

II. While a prisoner is being tried and his case still under examination, he is full of anxiety as to how it will end ; but if the judge passes sentence of death on him, his fear and terror know no bounds, as all those who have to prepare such prisoners for death know by experience. No matter how resigned they may have been before to the will of God, so that one might think that there would not be the least trouble in preparing them for death, when the fatal sentence is announced to them, they change at once, and give way to extreme anguish and despair. They brood over their fate, and neither know what they are saying themselves, nor understand what is said to them, and if their terror allows them to sleep, they dream of nothing but the sword, the wheel, or the gallows that is to deprive them of life.

See, O sinner, how it is with you, when you have within you the tormenting demon of a bad conscience. It not only reproaches you with your shame, but also reminds you that sentence of death, and of eternal death, too, has been passed on you. You are lost ! it says ; you have deserved death ! As long as you are in this state, you are doomed to destruction ! Sentence is passed on you already ; away to hell, to eternal fire ! When you hear the roar of the thunder and see the flash of the lightning, you are filled with anguish by the voice of conscience, which cries out to you, take care, an angry God is about to take vengeance on you ! A thunder-bolt will fall on you ; the lightning will strike you ! Will you not now at least remember that there is an all-powerful God, whom you must fear, and whom you have hitherto so grossly insulted ? If a pestilence attacks the city, and hurries off numbers of the people to their graves, your conscience fills you with terror. Alas ! it says, what will become of you ? Death is at your

very door! Do you think you can escape the calamity from which so many good and pious people have suffered? It is you and such as you who have been the cause of this calamity, and what would become of you if you were now to fall sick and die?

If you happen to hear of an accident, for instance, that poor man who was in perfect health when he went to bed last night, was found dead this morning; or, another man died in a quarter of an hour from a fit of apoplexy; or, that woman fell down and broke her neck; all these things are apt to fill you with mortal terror. Ah, your conscience says to you, you deserve that fate better than that man or that woman! Who knows what may happen to you this very day? If you chance, even against your will, to be present at a sermon which treats of death or hell, or the judgment of God, you are terror-stricken; every word you hear seems to confirm the sentence of your eternal damnation. If your secret vice is even faintly alluded to, your conscience is at once on the alert; that is meant for me, you think; what business has the preacher to speak so pointedly at me? If you remain away from the sermon, your conscience is alarmed at the sound of the bell which gives the signal for it; there, it says, you have a clear proof of your eternal reprobation, since you avoid the word of God, which could bring you to repentance.

Yes, says St. Crysostom, he who is plagued by a bad conscience often imagines that even lifeless creatures, the stones, the wall, and the shadows on it are so many voices that pronounce sentence on him; he is like a poor prisoner who, when he hears the least noise at his cell door, imagines that he is to be led forth at once to execution, although the noise may be merely the howling of the wind. The Holy Scripture gives us a striking proof of this in the wicked King Baltassar. Baltassar was seated at table surrounded by the nobles of his kingdom, when, in the midst of his revelry, he suddenly grew pale: and he cried out in dread, so that all who heard him were alarmed. And what was the matter? What had frightened him? "There appeared fingers, as it were of the hand of

a man, writing over against the candlestick upon the surface of the wall of the king's palace; and the king beheld the joints of the hand that wrote." And what did it write? Three little words, that the king did not even understand. What reason had he then for giving way to such excessive terror? It was not the hand, that frightened him, but his bad conscience, which made him suspect, what was really the case, that the hand was writing on the wall the sentence of death which his conscience had already pronounced on him.

There are countless examples of the same kind: Theodoric, king of Italy, nearly fainted with fright when he saw a fish brought to table, thinking it was the head of Symmachus, whom he had caused to be put to death, that was coming open-mouthed to devour him. When Henry VIII., king of England, was on his death-bed, he thought that those who were standing round were the religious whom he had banished or put to death, and who were coming to summon him before the judgment-seat of God. The emperor Constantius imagined that every shadow he saw was the ghost of his murdered brother, quaffing to him a goblet full of blood. Persus destroyed all the swallows' nests he could find and killed the birds themselves, because he thought that they were always accusing him of having murdered his father. Thus, "whereas wickedness is fearful it beareth witness of its condemnation." And this is the punishment that God threatens to inflict on sin, as we read in Deuteronomy: "If thou wilt not hear the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep and to do all his Commandments. . . . the Lord will give thee a fearful heart, and languishing eyes, and a soul consumed with pensiveness. Thou shalt fear night and day, neither shalt thou trust thy life. In the morning thou shalt say: who will grant me evening? and at evening, who will grant me morning? for the fearfulness of the heart, wherewith thou shalt be terrified." This is the torment of which St. Paul writes to the Romans, "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that worketh evil." It is the torment of which St. Augustine says that "amongst all the tribulations that can afflict the hu-

man soul, there is none greater than a bad conscience." Nay, if you wish to have, while still on earth some idea of the torments of hell, then learn what it is to have a bad conscience. Ask king David how his tortured him; he will tell you: "There is no health in my flesh, because of thy wrath; there is no peace for my bones because of my sins. I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end; I walked sorrowful all the day long. I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly; I roared with the groaning of my heart. My sin is always before me." The adultery and murder that I have committed are always before my mind.

Perhaps you may think that, because David had, before he sinned, a good and tender conscience, it is no wonder that he felt the sting of remorse so keenly afterwards? Ask,then, another, who was sunk in the very depths of depravity; Luther, I mean, who cast all honor and shame to the winds, who feared neither God nor man, who bid defiance to spiritual and temporal authority, to princes and potentates; and you will find that even he could not escape the tortures of remorse. Every day he indulged to excess in the pleasures of the table, hoping thereby to silence the reproaches of his conscience, but in vain. Hear his own words on this subject, as they are given by Ulenberg, his biographer: "Because I sometimes appear cheerful, people think I lead a happy life; but God sees what kind of a life I lead." He confessed to his friend Pomeranus that it was impossible to describe the mental anguish he suffered. You may read of people whose hair turned suddenly gray through remorse of conscience. Such was the case with Louis the Severe, whose hair turned gray in a single night through remorse at a murder he was guilty of; so that although he was quite a young man, he looked next morning as if he were seventy years old. You will find examples of people who, to get rid of the tortures of remorse, made away with themselves by hanging themselves to a bed post, or piercing their hearts with a dagger, or cutting their throats, or drowning themselves, etc. Thus they preferred to go straight to hell, rather than bear any longer the torment of a bad conscience. So true is it that "amongst

all the tribulations that can afflict the human soul, there is none greater than a bad conscience."

Sinners, to you I address my conclusion in the words of St. Paul to the Romans, "what fruit therefore had you then in those things, of which you are now ashamed?" Tell me, pray, what advantage have you gained by incurring the guilt of sin in the sight of God? What remains to you now of the past and momentary pleasure in which you sought your gratification? What have you gained by concealing that abominable sin in confession? You know now by your own experience, although you may not show it outwardly, what the result of your sin is, and it is nothing else but secret shame, anguish, and remorse of conscience, a hell upon earth. Are you not cruel towards yourselves in thus burdening your minds with such intolerable anguish? Are you not foolish in deferring repentance, when you can at once free yourselves from the miserable state in which you are? But perhaps you think I am exaggerating; perhaps you do not feel this torture so keenly? I know that not every sinner suffers from remorse in the same degree; there are some who suffer more, and others, less; according as their consciences are tender, or hardened; in the same way, too, there are some vices that cause more shame than others; and finally, time lessens remorse to a certain extent; yet there is hardly any one who does not feel it in some degree or other. But if there is any one who, after having committed grievous sin, feels no uneasiness, nor remorse, then, alas! I need say no more to him, for he is evidently hardened in wickedness and abandoned by God; and that is the greatest punishment, next to eternal damnation, that can be inflicted on sin. But if you still feel your consciences uneasy, oh, then thank God, and drive away the tormenting demon at once by sincere repentance and amendment! Do not think the worse of preachers or confessors if they reprove your vices sharply and try to deter you from sin by describing the malice of it. They mean well with you, and their object is either to save you from falling into sin and from thus incurring the tortures of remorse, or to free you from the state of sin, if you are

already in it. If there was no other punishment for sin but an uneasy conscience, you should try to avoid all sin. If there was no other reward for a virtuous life, but the peace of mind that a good conscience brings, that alone should be enough to induce you to try to do the holy will of God in all things. Pious Christians! let this be your conclusion: do not allow yourselves to be deceived by the false and merely apparent happiness of sinners; serve your God faithfully, and enjoy in the possession of the highest good that peace which surpasses all worldly joys, and is a foretaste of the eternal joys of heaven. Amen.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

CONFIDENCE IN THE DIVINE ASSISTANCE IN UNAVOIDABLE DANGERS.

"*Many are called, but few chosen.*" Matt. 20 : 16.

"Many are called" to the eternal possession of the kingdom of heaven; "but few are chosen" actually to possess it. And why? The fault does not lie with the Almighty God. He has called all men, without exception; all men, as far as he can, he has chosen for heaven. But we need not long consider to find out the cause. If we only look at the lives led by most people in the world, we must acknowledge that they are not chosen; for every day, they close the gate of heaven faster against themselves by their sins. And whence come those manifold sins? Not only from an inborn weakness and propensity to sin; but from the bad example of others, from dangerous associations, from a non-avoidance of the proximate occasions of sin. This is why, if many are called, so few are chosen. Alas! I seem to hear some men of good will sighing: Who then can be saved? Who

can shun all the daily unavoidable occasions of sin ? That such may not despair of being chosen for heaven, I say to them :

I. That if there are many necessary dangers and many unavoidable occasions of sin that daily beset us against our will ;

II. God will not abandon him who trusts in him, ana co-operates with his grace.

I. Ah, God help us, is the cry of many ! We would willingly bear with everything, if we were not daily and hourly exposed to the danger of sin wherever we go ! What else is married life, but an unceasing source of trouble and annoyance, of impatience, of cursing and swearing, of quarrelling and dissension ? "My husband is bad-tempered and given to drink !" says one. "My wife is fond of idleness and an easy life," cries another. "My children are disobedient," claims a third. "The neighbors pry into everything, and put the worst construction on every act !" declares a fourth : "I cannot even trust my best friends at all times, for more than once they have deceived me !" How can one practise Christian patience and meekness under such circumstances ? Who can be so well grounded in virtue, as not sometimes to sin by anger and impatience, by cursing and swearing ? What else is my secret poverty and the hard work I must do, but a source of inordinate sadness, and almost of despair, as well as of the sins that arise from it ? What is my office or employment, but a snare laid to entice me to commit sins of injustice, unless I am very careful ? I have to deal with all sorts and conditions of people, to hear all kinds of talk, to see dangerous objects continually ! Who can be on his guard so as to keep his senses under control in such circumstances ? Must he not now and then break out into unseemly language, or at least sin in thought and desire ? In a word, wherever you turn, there are occasions of sinning in thought, word, and deed, and of losing your soul.

I acknowledge the truth of all this ; but do you think you are the only one whose salvation is exposed to so many risks ? By no means. There is no state so holy, no household so pure, as to exclude temptations. He who wishes to avoid them all, must leave this world altogether, as St. Paul says : "Otherwise you must needs go out of this world" (1 Cor. 5 : 10). Divine Providence allows temptations to assail men in every state of life, as a means of combat and victory ; and they who wish to serve him zealously are even more exposed to such assaults than they who live in sin. "Let no one, then, be surprised, nor give utterance to a complaint that is common enough, if he finds that, after having done true penance and freed himself from the state of sin, and commenced to love God sincerely, he is more vigorously assailed by temptation than formerly ; for that is an evident sign that he has escaped the snares of the devil, who is now attacking him more fiercely, in order to lead him again into sin. The more the devil sees that we oppose him, the more trouble does he take to overcome us ; for he leaves alone those whom he knows he has peaceable possession of; but his attacks against us become more violent, when he sees that we have driven him out of our hearts, which he wishes to look on as his own property." And after a man by true penance has overcome the first temptation, God allows the combat to be renewed more vigorously after his conversion, that we may not be too sure of ourselves or look on ourselves as already holy, lest a deceitful security should cause our downfall after we have gained the victory.

Now, if God has placed you in a state in which you are more exposed to danger, if he has ordained that you should have greater difficulties to contend with, and have to use more violence than others to gain heaven, dare you, nay, can you complain of that, or ask why he has dealt with you so ? He can offer you his heaven at whatever price pleases him ; and if he required you to overcome a thousand times more difficulties in order to gain it, certainly heaven is worth striving for, even on those terms. Can he not give a penny to those who come at the last hour to work in

his vineyard, as well as to those who have borne the heat and burden of the day? Now, by an all-wise decree of his Providence, he has placed you in the state in which you are. He has arranged, too, all the circumstances of that state. He knows, and has known from all eternity, all the occasions, allurements, and temptations to sin that are to beset you, or that under any circumstances can come in your way. He knows your strength, too, and how much you can bear; and moreover, as St. Paul says, "He is a good and faithful God, who will not allow a heavier burden than you can bear to be placed on your shoulders, nor permit a temptation to assail you that you cannot overcome; nay, he will even make temptation profitable to you" (1Cor. 10 : 13). Besides all this, he is the almighty Lord, who will not allow you to fight alone, but will take the greater share of the work and trouble on himself, and will help you with his grace, so that, if you only will, you may easily overcome the temptation. The observance of the commandments of God is called by Christ our Saviour, who knew well the difficulties and dangers of every state, "a yoke," and in fact he calls it "My yoke," giving us thereby to understand that we are not alone in bearing the divine law, but that God, who helps us, bears it with us; and by his help, that which otherwise would be difficult becomes sweet. For the same reason, he calls the burden of the commandments, "My burden," because he shares it with us, so that it becomes easy and light.

II. Once more, I say that it is, and remains certain, that the good God has prepared powerful graces and helps for men to enable them to avoid sin in the dangers that are inseparable from their state, provided they work with his grace as they ought. The Holy Scripture gives us abundant proof of this in the conversation that God had with Moses on Mount Horeb. Moses was sent by God as ambassador to Pharao in Egypt, to persuade him, or, if necessary, to compel him to allow the Israelites to go out of slavery. "Come," said God, "and I will send thee to Pharao, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel,

out of Egypt" (Exod. 3 : 10). Learned and prudent, brave and courageous as Moses was, the thought of the dangers he would run in such a mission, made him shrink from undertaking it. Therefore, he humbly begged God to spare him and to send some one else, who was better fitted for such a task. "And Moses said to God : Who am I that I should go to Pharao ?" (Ibid. 11.) I am too weak for a task like that. In order to encourage him, God told him to throw on the ground the rod which he held in his hand, and it was immediately changed into a serpent. See, Moses, what you can do with such a weak instrument! Are you still afraid on account of your weakness and incapacity ? But Moses was not yet satisfied. "It is true," he thought, "I have worked a miracle ; but it was done in the desert, where God is with me to help me !" To work miracles when there is no occasion for them, and when God is there to help, is one thing ; but to work them when there is really necessity and danger, is another thing ! He then put forward his want of eloquence : In order, then, said the Lord, that thou mayest lay aside all fear, and mayest look on thyself as safe even in the midst of danger, I tell thee, "Go therefore, and I will be in thy mouth ; and I will teach thee what thou shalt speak" (Exod. 4: 12)."Behold, I have appointed thee the God of Pharao" (Ibid. 7: 1); thou shalt exercise over him, not a human, but a divine power. At last, Moses was convinced. He went, and performed the duty entrusted to him with the greatest success. Peter was once out in his boat, fishing with his companions, when they saw Christ coming towards them on the water. "Lord, if it be thou," cried out Peter, "bid me come to thee upon the waters"(Matt. 14:28,29). And Christ said to him : "Come !" and Peter, getting out of the boat, walked on the water as if it were dry land ; but a storm arose and he got afraid : "But seeing the wind strong, he was afraid ; and when he began to sink, he cried out ; and immediately Jesus,stretching forth his hand,took hold of him" (Ibid. 30: 31). On another occasion, Peter heard John saying that their Master was on the shore, whereupon he "cast himself into the sea"

(John 21: 7). Mark the difference! On the first occasion, he walked on the water, but now he goes swimming to the land. But why so? If his love for Christ was so strong, his faith and confidence so great, why did he not walk on the waters on this, as on the former occasion? If he succeeded in doing so before, and that, too, in the midst of a storm, why should he not do it now, when the sea was calm? Ah! Yes, thought Peter: but the first time the Lord called me, and when I was in danger of sinking, he stretched forth his hand to save me. Now, he has not called me; it would be presumption for me to expect him to help me; hence I will swim to the shore. In the same way, if God's Providence has called you to the state, office, or occupation in which you are, if you have entered on it after due deliberation with God, and with a reasonable motive, oh, then be comforted and have courage! Even if a violent storm should trouble the waters, if many dangerous occasions and temptations should assail you in that state or employment, you will not sink under them. Only have confidence in the Almighty power of God. Call out to him often with Peter: "Lord, save me, or I perish!" and he will stretch out his hand and help you with his grace, that you may pass safely through the danger without any injury to your soul.

Many, says St. Augustine, are neither conquered nor assailed, and yet they are sinners; for they fall into sin without inducement or temptation; sin does not offer itself to them, nor stretch out its hand to them, but they seek it themselves and go out to meet it, when they rush into the dangerous occasion. Is it wonderful, then, that in punishment of such presumption, God should withdraw his helping hand from those souls, even in the dangers incidental to their state, and allow them to fall miserably into sin? A dissolute soldier, who had gone some distance away from his comrades, and was walking about in a field, saw a girl on a hill, herding sheep. He went up to her, but the innocent girl was afraid of him, and, as she was quite alone, and there was no one near to help her, she ran off at once and left the sheep behind her. The soldier drew his sword and pursued her, until she came to the top of

a steep rock, and there was nothing left for her, then, but either to cast herself down and break her neck, or allow the soldier to work his wicked will on her. Either fate was hard. She reflected for a few moments as to what course she should follow, but the love of purity and the fear of offending God sank so deeply into her heart that she resolved to sacrifice her life rather than lose her virginal chastity. Abandoning herself to divine Providence, she cast herself from the rock, at the foot of which flowed a deep river. But see how God protects virtue even in extreme danger! Her guardian angel bore the maiden up, so that she came down gently on the bank of the river, quite unhurt. On another occasion, the same girl was on the rock with her sheep, when she thought to herself: "How easily I came down here the other day! I must try it again." And she actually leaped from the rock, but before reaching the ground, she broke her neck. She succeeded the first time, because necessity and love of holy purity compelled her to go into evident danger, and therefore she was helped by the hand of God. But the next time she was influenced only by curiosity and childish daring, and hence, lost her life. So it is also with us in the dangers of sin; when we go into them out of necessity and on account of the requirements of our state with a good end in view, we may well rely on the special help of grace, but not when we wantonly seek the danger.

"Help yourself, and God will help you," says the proverb. Oh, how many fail in this respect! They toil and moil the whole week in the state, duty, trade, or employment, in which they know they have occasions enough of sin, and yet they hardly know what spiritual weapons are, or how they are to arm themselves against temptations. They seldom go to confession or Communion; they think it enough to receive those holy Sacraments once a year. (And would that even then they received them properly!) They hear nothing good for a whole week at a time, seldom read spiritual books, hardly ever think of God during the day, rarely come to a sermon, which would encourage them to do good, deter them from evil, and remind them of the duties of their state. They

practise no morning devotions, make no examen of conscience, and do not guard their senses during the day. Their whole occupation, nay, their whole hearts, are directed to temporal things. What wonder is it then, that, as such people forget God, they are forgotten by him in turn, so that, when the occasion presents itself, they fall into sin, and finally lose their souls?

We must arm ourselves in all our undertakings with the remembrance of God, and of his holy presence. Even in the midst of our work and of weighty occupations, we can do that, by a passing thought, or a so-called aspiration. For God must be excluded from the memory before the will can consent to sin. It is almost impossible for a good Christian, really desirous of saving his soul, to commit a mortal sin, so long as he retains a lively recollection of God's presence. Another means is the frequent reception of the Holy Sacraments, for they are the channels by which divine grace flows into our souls. More especially, we should be careful to confess frequently to a learned and prudent confessor, not changing him without necessity. Nor should we omit the evening examen of conscience, in which we can discover the sins and faults committed during the day, repent of them, and make a resolution of amendment. A garden cannot run wild when one pulls up the weeds daily; and a bad habit cannot help but be gradually gotten rid of when the conscience is daily cleansed and purified. Hear the word of God in sermons as frequently and attentively as possible. Experience teaches, that sermons fill the mind with good thoughts, and encourage and strengthen us to persevere in the divine service. This is as necessary for the well-educated as for the illiterate; for the end and object of preaching is not merely to instruct us in what we are ignorant of, but also, and especially, to move and incite us to do what we know to be advantageous for the salvation of our souls. Finally, we must be careful when we awaken from sleep, each day, to give the first fruits of the morning, to God, for to him alone belong the first fruits of all our undertakings. Generally speaking, the manner in which we spend the day depends on its

beginning. They who begin it by zealously performing their morning devotions may notice that during the course of the day they feel a special impulse to good, as well as a consolation and spiritual joy in God during their work.

It would be well, too, after having made the good intention, to bring before one's mind the occasions of sin that are apt to arise during the day; the places in which one has to go; the persons he has to deal with; the business he has to do; the troubles and annoyances he has to contend with; the faults and sins he generally commits; and then to fortify his mind and will by a firm resolution, saying to himself: I must be careful not to commit sin on this or that occasion; I must see that I meet with meekness and charity those who are apt to contradict me; that I bear this or that cross with patience for God's sake, etc. I am prepared rather to die than offend God by sin this day. But if you break your good resolutions, for instance, if you get angry and curse, you must at once strike your breast, or say to yourself: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" and then, renew your good resolution. In order the better to carry it into effect, we must recommend it every day to God with child-like confidence in some such ways as these: Behold, O dear Lord, thou knowest the state in which I am, the dangers and occasions of sin that surround me; therefore thou must help me! Help me, then, since thou hast promised to do so! I will co-operate with thee as well as I can. Grant me to fulfil thy holy will in all things, and to persevere in thy love to the end. Amen.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE MERITS TO BE GAINED IN AN UNAVOIDABLE ASSOCIATION WITH SINNERS.

"*They believe for a while, and in the time of temptation, they fall away.*" Luke 8 : 13.

The seed of the word of God falls on some hearts as on a hard rock, where it can neither take root, nor bear fruit ! Such people go to sermons, listen with pleasure and satisfaction, and make the best resolutions : "Now, I will begin to give up this bad habit !" "Henceforth, I will never offend God deliberately !" and so on. And those resolutions are confirmed by confession and Communion. That is all very good. If the speakers acted up to their resolutions, they would be sure of heaven. But, "they believe" as the Gospel says, only "for a while ;" their goodness is of short duration In the smallest occasion of sin, "in the time of temptation, they fall away ;" they relapse into their former sins. Now, all this need not be. If you only do what you can in such dangerous company and occasions, as it is impossible to avoid, the help of God's special grace will not be wanting to keep you from falling. For, be it known to you, dear Christians :

I. That God makes use of intercourse with sinners to his honor and glory ; and hence:

II. That we, too, must embrace as an occasion of merit our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked.

I. So great and bitter is God's hatred of sin and of the sinner that, according to the teaching of theologians, if it were possible for him to withdraw his omnipresence from any of his creatures he would withdraw it from sinners. Hence St. John Chrysostom re-

marks that while omnipresence is, indeed, one of the chief attributes and perfections of God, it is also that attribute which, humanly speaking, causes him most trouble and annoyance; for it compels him to remain with sinners and to have intercourse with them, although they are objects of his special hatred, aversion, and execration. "To God, the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike" (Wisd. 14 : 9). But, you may ask, since such is the case, and since God is omnipotent, why does he not at once destroy the sinner? Ah! no (blessed be the divine mercy!), God preserves the sinner; he has patience with him for years and years. He feeds and looks after him with as much care as he bestows on his beloved children. Why does he act thus?

St. Paul says, that God has ordained every created thing for his own honor and glory:—"Who worketh all things according to the counsel of his will; that we may be unto the praise of his glory" (Ephes. 1 : 11, 12). But what glory can God receive from sinners, who dishonor him, despise his law, and defy him to his face; who blaspheme his holy name, and by their bad example and scandals lead others into sin? Though God receives no honor from sinners, he makes use of the very contempt with which they treat him as means to promote his glory. St. Augustine says on this point: "There is no doubt that God makes a good use of the sinner; for he would not even allow him to exist, if he could not use him for some good purpose." Do you wish to know in what way even the most wicked, scandalous, and obdurate sinners in the world can contribute so wonderfully, even against their will, to the honor and glory of God? Then, consider the number of men in the world who are shut out from the light of the true faith; look at the idolatrous heathens, the superstitious Turks, the hardened Jews, the rebellious heretics and schismatics; does not the God of infinite wisdom use all such persons to further his most important undertakings?

"Does he not make use of the gentiles to carry out his designs?" Does he not make the gentiles serve to manifest the wonders of his grace? A heathen world converted and changed by

twelve poor fishermen, as we see it to-day ; what greater proof could there be of the divine power and Providence? What greater confirmation of the evident truth of our holy religion? Does he not make use of heretics for the explanation and spread of his doctrine, and to strengthen believers in the one, true Catholic faith, wherein alone salvation can be found? Never is the truth of that faith better investigated, or more clearly proved and brought to the light of day, than when it is attacked and opposed by different errors and heresies; and generally speaking, never do Catholics show more zeal in defending their religion, than when they have to live in the midst of heretics. Does he not make use of schisms and disunion as means and instruments to make evident the indestructible solidity of his Church, foretold by Jesus Christ, so that the gates of hell shall never prevail against her? In spite of many schisms, the body of the Church still remains in its substantial unity under the one head on earth, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, while we know from experience that sects and heresies constantly change and decay. The Jews, that unhappy remnant of the once chosen people of God, scattered as they are through the world, without king, priest, temple, or head, are they not, even against their will, living proofs that Jesus Christ is the true Messias and Saviour of the world, and that his prophecies with regard to their dispersion have been fulfilled up to the present day? What have the tyrants and persecutors of the Christian name effected? The very means they made use of to destroy the Christians have only added to their number, given martyrs to Christ, filled his Church with Saints, and heaven with the elect. And all other sinners in the world, no matter how numerous they are, serve to make known to men the perfections of the Lord God. Therefore it is true that God makes use of sinners and their wickedness to further his honor and glory.

Here, my dear Christians, you have an example of how to act when thrown involuntarily with wicked and dangerous companions. We must indeed fly and avoid all such as well as we can; but if our state of life and our duty compel us to have intercourse with

them, we must use them in the same way as God does, for the profit and advantage of our souls. We have abundant opportunities of doing this every day, although we may not seek them; for, as St. Ambrose says, as his toleration of sinners serves the Lord God to make known his perfections, so our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked must serve us in the practice of the chief virtues. If, for instance, I have to live with people whose conduct occasions me much annoyance, either because I have a natural dislike for them, or because they maliciously persecute and trouble me, what a splendid opportunity I have here for the practice of Christian patience and mortification! If I have to live with obstinate, passionate, and hot-tempered people, what a grand opportunity I have for practising Christian meekness! If they contradict me, or vent their ill-humor on me, can I not give them an example of Christian charity by returning good for evil? If they are proud and puffed-up, and conform more to worldly vanities than I do, I can teach them daily lessons of Christian humility and modesty, according to the example of our Lord, who was as the least of men on earth. If they are given to gluttony and drunkenness, I can learn from their excesses how odious those vices are, and how necessary it is to practise Christian sobriety and temperance. If I hear them cursing, swearing, blaspheming, detracting from their neighbor's good fame, that hellish language should teach me to restrain my tongue, and be more fervent in blessing the holy name of God. If they are addicted to many vices that I can neither prevent nor induce them to forsake, they compel me to acknowledge with gratitude the special graces and benefits that God has conferred on me, since he has preserved me, in preference to so many others, from those sins; for, according to the testimony of St. Augustine, without those graces, I should be just as bad as they are. They force me to know myself, and humbly to confess my own weakness, obliging me to walk more circumspectly, lest I should fall into like vices. St. Paul says: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (Cor. 10 : 12).

Nay, the holy Pope, St. Gregory, ventures to say that, in the ordinary course of things, no one can practise true virtue, or, at all events, practise it perfectly, unless he is, now and then, by divine decree forced to live amongst the wicked. How, in fact, can a man know whether he possesses a certain virtue or not, if nothing occurs to prove or try him in it? No great art is required to be patient amongst the patient, or to be meek amongst the meek; to be charitable amongst the charitable, temperate amongst the temperate, humble amongst the humble, or chaste amongst the chaste? Verily, in that case, virtue, having no combat to sustain, would not deserve to be called heroic, would not be meritorious, or gain its exceeding great reward.

On the other hand, whosoever lives and deals with sinners, remaining in the midst of them (God helping), constant and steadfast, having no part in their wickedness, allowing neither promises nor threats, flatteries nor caresses, ridicule nor annoyances to get the better of one's good resolutions; firmly setting aside all human respect, utterly disregarding what others do or say, and not to depart a hair's breadth from the principles of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel; it is in this, that real, heroic, and praiseworthy virtue consists. This it is which proves that we love God above all things. If the climax of wickedness in the sinner is, according to the testimony of the prophet Isaias, to be wicked amongst the good and pious: "In the land of the saints he hath done wicked things, and he shall not see the glory of the Lord" (Isai. 26: 10), it may reasonably be inferred that the perfection of justice and holiness consists in being and remaining pious amongst the wicked.

II. But, alas! what happens most frequently? Generally speaking, we become perverted with the wicked, instead of making a good use of them. We quarrel with the quarrelsome, curse with the profane, indulge in invective with the contumelious, drink to excess with drunkards, gamble with gamesters, dance with dancers; we do without hesitation what we see others doing; we speak as

they speak ; nay, mere fashion and custom has in our eyes the power of making everything lawful. Thus, while God furthers his honor and glory by bearing with sinners, we seek in our intercourse with them a cause of our ruin and eternal damnation.

It makes me sick to hear a man allege his state of life or employment, as an excuse for his faults and sins, saying that one cannot be other than bad when one has to live with wicked people. Nor does it cause me less pain to hear a woman lamenting her sad condition, and pretending that the greater number of her sins are to be attributed to her drunken, ill-tempered, dissolute husband. What can we say to such people? They are to be pitied, indeed, not on account of the unhappy state of which they complain, for it is that in which they are placed by divine Providence, but on account of the bad use they make of it, contrary to God's will and intention. The very means that should serve to increase their merits and further their salvation, they pervert into an instrument of their own ruin. I pity the woman, not because she has so much trouble and misery to suffer, but because she either does not know, or does not consider, that her ill-conditioned husband is a cross imposed on her by the inscrutable decrees of God, to serve as a ladder whereby she may ascend to eternal joys.

Still more do I grieve, nor can I always restrain my displeasure, when I hear some, on being exhorted to give up this or that sinful custom, say, in the words of the prophet Isaias : "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people that hath unclean lips" (Is. 6 : 5). That is, they appeal at once to the example of others, and to the evil customs of the world. I speak and act in this or that way, they say, but I cannot do otherwise, for I am living amongst people who speak and act in that way. What others of my condition do, I must do also. If they amend, then I will follow their example. What answer can I make to such people? I might say to them, in the words of St. Peter: "Having your conversation good among the gentiles," amongst those of your own condition; "for so is the will of God, that by doing well

you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Pet. 2 : 12,15). But my words would have little effect on them, so that there is nothing left for me but to bewail their folly and blindness, in misusing a grand opportunity of showing their fidelity and love to God, and in turning it into an occasion of dishonoring him all the more, of despising his holy law, and of helping to make vice more common and shameless by imitating the bad example of others. Instead of following with the small number of the elect the narrow path traced by Christ, that leads to heaven, they prefer to go with the majority on the broad road that leads to everlasting ruin.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ON GIVING EDIFICATION TO THE WICKED.

"*And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.*"
Luke 18 : 43.

Christ, the Son of God, knew well what was to happen to him, in a short time in the city of Jerusalem, amongst the wicked Jews ; for he had foretold it to his disciples. Why, then, did he not remain away ? Why did he make such haste to go to Jerusalem ? So great was his love for all men, and his desire to save them from hell by dying a painful and disgraceful death, that while he was on the way to Jericho, he converted a great number, and impelled them to praise God, by miraculously giving sight to a blind man : "And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God." Here again, we have a pattern and example of the use we should make of those bad companions and occasions of sin that our state of life does not permit us to avoid. Almighty God makes use of his dealings with sinners to further his own honor and glory, and we, too, should use our intercourse with them for the good of our souls. Now I say further—

I. That, since God makes use of his dealings with sinners for

their conversion and amendment, so too, in our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked,

II. We should do our best to edify others and give them good example.

I. In unavoidable associations and intercourse with the wicked we must seek, not merely the advantage of our own souls, but we must also endeavor, as far as we can, to convert others and bring them to God. Such is the obligation incumbent on every Christian, no matter what may be his state, occupation, or condition ; and it is an obligation that specially binds people in certain states of life. For example, tell me, whose duty is it to keep in order, and chastise a disobedient, dissolute, drunken, and wicked son ? Who is bound to undertake that task, if not his own father ? If a vain young girl spends her time in idleness, sitting at the window or standing at the door in order to see the passers-by and be seen by them ; if she sleeps till late in the day, and hardly knows how to do anything but trick herself out in the latest fashion; if she is far too familiar with persons of the opposite sex, and prefers frequenting balls and parties, taking part in amusements, paying visits, and spending her time in dancing and amusing herself, to hearing the word of God in sermons and going often to the Sacraments ; who is bound to instruct her, to make her give up those vanities, to keep her at home, and to occupy her with some work suited to her condition, if not her mother ? And if the mother neglects to perform this duty, who is bound to correct and to punish both, if not the father, again ? But, alas, where is this zeal for souls to be found in the proper measure ? They who should correct others are sometimes the very ones to give them bad example. The father, who should correct his drunken son, is himself addicted to drink ; the mother, who should reprove her vain daugther, goes with her to balls and parties, is just as eager in following the fashions, and leads just as idle a life as herself.

There is no one in the world whom God has not obliged in some

way or other to look after his neighbor's salvation : "And he gave to every one of them commandment concerning his neighbor" (Ecclus. 17 : 12). How is that ? Because there is no one in the world who is not bound by the precept of Christian charity to help his neighbor when he can. From this springs the general obligation, binding on all, of assisting the poor and needy according to one's means. Now, if the law of charity binds every one to show mercy and charity to the poor in their temporal wants, how much more does not the same law oblige each one to show mercy and compassion to sinners in their spiritual necessities ! And if we cannot, without sinning against the law of charity towards God and our neighbor, refuse to help him who is in want in those things that concern his body and this mortal life, can we be said to satisfy the requirements of that law, if, by our carelessness or indifference, we allow the immortal souls of our brethren, purchased so dearly by the precious blood of Christ, to go to ruin ?

"My brethren," says the apostle St. James, in his Epistle, "if any of you err from the truth, and one convert him, he must know that he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death" (Jas. 5: 19, 20). Amongst the sinners and wicked people with whom we have daily to associate, says St. Augustine, there are many who, as God foresees, will be in the number of the elect, provided we help them to be converted; while, if that help and zeal on our part be wanting to them, they will be lost forever. Now we do not know who those sinners are; for the elect and the reprobate, are so mixed up together in this life, that we cannot distinguish one from the other. Hence, then, our charity must be general, and our zeal for souls, as far as possible, universal. St. Paul frequently warned the faithful to give a good example to the heathens and idolaters with whom they had to live; and he praises the Corinthians for having done much good in that way: "Your emulation hath provoked very many" (2 Cor. 9 : 2). The Apostle himself, before giving those exhortations to the faithful, taught them by his own example ; for after his conversion, hardly had he refreshed his body, worn out by a three

days' fast, than he began to work for the conversion of the Jews and other sinners: "And immediately he preached Jesus in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9 : 20). Our Lord himself gave a similar exhortation to St. Peter, when he said to him: "And thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren" (Luke 22: 32). And his royal ancestor, David, after having repented of the crimes of murder and adultery, declared his zealous resolution to bring back to the right path those who like himself had strayed from it: "I will teach the unjust thy ways; and the wicked shall be converted to thee" (Ps. 1 : 15). The law of charity in fact, my brethren, binds us all to deter our neighbor from evil and to encourage him to do good.

II. More especially are we bound by our good conduct and edifying lives to give a holy example, so that the wicked with whom we may have to associate may find therein a cause of salutary confusion, to impel them to speedy repentance. For this reason, St. Paul writes to his disciple Titus : "Speak thou the things that become sound doctrine : that the aged men be sober; . . . the aged women in like manner, in holy attire; . . . young men in like manner exhort that they be sober . . . These things speak, and exhort and rebuke with all authority" (Tit. 2: 1, 2,3, 6,15). But above all, "in all things show thyself an example of good works, in doctrine, in integrity, in gravity, . . . that he who is on the contrary part may be afraid,having no evil to say of us" (Ibid. 7,8). Such, too, is the advice given by St. Peter to the pious : "Having your conversation good among the gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by the good works which they shall behold in you glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2 : 12). This doctrine they learned from the lips of their Master Jesus Christ, who had said to them, "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5 : 16).

But how am I to understand this ? In many other parts of the Gospel, Christ commands me to do quite the contrary,

namely, to conceal my good works from the eyes of men. "Take heed that you do not your justice before men to be seen by them; otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5: 1). Is there not an evident contradiction here? No. To do good solely for the purpose of being seen by others and praised by them is the vainglory that Christ condemns in hypocrites; to do good and lead a pious life, so as to be seen by men, not for the sake of gaining honor and praise, but to further the honor and glory of God; to do good, even in public, for the advantage of our neighbor, that he may be edified and encouraged to do good also, that is not only lawful, but praiseworthy and meritorious, and in many cases a matter of strict duty.

Thus the father of a family acts very well and according to the requirements of Christian charity, who says or thinks to himself: I will go often and with all possible devotion to confession and holy Communion; I will never neglect to hear a sermon on Sundays and holy-days. All this, I will do publicly, so that my children, servants, neighbors, and other people of the same condition as myself may be induced to serve God in the same manner. In the morning I will kneel down and say my morning prayers; in the evening, before retiring to rest, I will assemble the whole household and will make the examen of conscience and say evening prayers. If poor beggars come to the door, I will give them an alms with my own hands, so that all in the house may be edified and encouraged to perform similar acts of devotion and charity. Thus, too, the mistress of a household acts very well and in accordance with the law of the love of God and of our neighbor, when she thinks or says: I will dress modestly and in a Christian manner, and will not hesitate to appear thus dressed in public, although I should be the only one to do so; for my example may be the means of inducing others of my condition to imitate me. I will keep my daughter at home in seclusion, teach her to keep house and to do other work suited to her condition, and not allow her to frequent parties, so that others, like me, may be encouraged

to do as I do, and to unite with me in procuring the honor and glory of our heavenly Father. Oh, what wonderful changes might be brought about in the world by such edifying example!

St. Gregory says that in certain circumstances one may even praise himself, his good works, his virtues, and his mode of life, if he does it with a proper end in view, that is, for the honor and glory of God and to encourage other men to follow his good example. Many holy servants of God praised themselves in that way. Job, otherwise so humble, boasts before the whole world: "I was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame. I was the father of the poor" (Job 29: 15, 16); that is, I helped all, and assisted them in their corporal and spiritual necessities, as well as I could. Does not the great St. Paul relate in detail to the Corinthians the labors he underwent, the good works he performed? "They are the ministers of Christ; I am more; in many more labors, in prisons more frequently, in stripes above measure, in deaths often" (2 Cor. 11: 23). Nay, he proposes himself as an example for their imitation: "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11: 1).

Therefore a mother need make no scruple of her seeming self-praise, when she says to her daughters, although they may be already married: When I was your age, I was much more modest than you are; I did not even dream of going out to parties as you do, of dressing in the latest fashion, of spending my time idly at the window, or in unnecessary visits. My parents (may God and they be thanked for it!) brought me up much better; why do you not imitate me? Why do you not bring up your children in the same manner? Nor need any one make a scruple of saying in company: God be praised, I am not aware that a farthing of unjust gain ever came into my hands; or that, through human respect, I ever said a word more or less than what my duty required; or that I ever encouraged any one to drink more than was good for him. I do not allow card-parties to meet at my house, nor permit my wife or daughters to dress too extravagantly; no one in my house would dare to appear at nightly gatherings. In a word,

when one has a good object in view, it is not only praiseworthy and meritorious to show that one practises good works, especially, when they are commanded by the law of God, but it is even necessary and a matter of duty to do so. For, if it is our bounden duty, according to the law of Christian charity and mercy, to give good advice, what better advice can there be than good example, given for the praiseworthy motives I have mentioned? "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works." Mark, how Christ compares good example to a light. And why? A lighted candle sheds its rays on all sides of it, but see where the flame points to; it always points to heaven. Such, too, should be the nature of the good example we give; it must shine on all sides and be seen by all men; but our intention must be directed to heaven, to God, in order to seek his honor alone and the spiritual good of others.

Now, if the law of charity towards all men obliges us to give good example to our associates in order to induce sinners to amend their lives, how much more are we not bound to avoid doing anything, even if we imagine it to be lawful, which could encourage the wicked in their practices, or be an occasion of sin to the innocent!

Hear what St. Paul says: "If meat scandalize my brother, I will never eat flesh, lest I should scandalize my brother" (1 Cor. 8: 13). Speaking of these words, St. Ambrose says: "So much regard should we have for the law of charity, that we should consider lawful things as unlawful, lest they might be a source of sin to others." There are, namely, many things lawful and decent in themselves; but! but! What is the meaning of that *but*? For instance, conversation or intimacy with this or that person may be lawful in itself, so that not the least evil is done, even in thought; but if it occurs too often, it furnishes the neighbors or servants with matter for a reasonable suspicion of evil. A young girl dresses above her means; she has to work hard during the week in order to be able to appear in the newest fashions on Sundays and holy-days; of course, there is nothing wrong in all this; but what ideas does it not put into people's heads about her! Nor

have they unreasonable grounds for their suspicions. A woman dresses like others of her standing, according to the vain fashions of the world, but, as she imagines, she does not transgress the bounds of decorum; she takes part in all amusements and is fond of going to parties; all that is lawful enough, according to her ideas; but by the apparently lawful customs she follows, she helps to keep up abuses that are not lawful. In these, and similar circumstances, Christian charity obliges us, when we can do so without suffering any great loss, to give up that conversation, that intimacy, that extravagance in dress, that worldly custom, in order not to scandalize others.

And what conclusion am I to draw from all this? If Christian charity requires us to avoid what is lawful in itself, lest we should give occasion of sin to others, how terribly they sin, who try to propagate wickedness by word and example, by advice and instruction, by approval and instigation, thus leading others into sin! St. John Chrysostom calls such people "agents and representatives of the devil, murderers of souls, betrayers of the Blood of Jesus Christ." "Woe" cries our Lord: "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh" (Matt. 8: 7). They who know themselves to be guilty in this respect, are, above all other men, under a special obligation of doing all they can for the future in word and deed to help convert the wicked, so as to gain for God either the souls they have perverted, or, if that is impossible, the souls of others, in order to make good the loss they have occasioned the almighty God. When Octavius Augustus heard of the slaughter of his three best legions, which was caused by the negligence of Quintilius Varus, he cried out, full of indignation, "Quintilius Varus, give me back my legions!" So will God cry out to those people in a terrible voice from his judgment-seat: Give me back the souls you took from me! Restore to me the souls that you have stolen from me by giving them scandal!

My dear brethren, I trust that none of us are guilty in this way. If we are obliged to go into the company of the wicked, let us make use of our intercourse with them according to the law of

Christian charity, and in the manner in which God makes use of his patience in bearing with sinners ; that is, not only for the good of our own souls, but also for the good of the souls of others. Most of that good will be the work of our edifying example ; and none of us, no matter what is his state or condition, can reasonably excuse himself from the performance of this duty. If we have no other means at hand to help in the conversion of the wicked, let us, at all events, recommend them to the mercy of God by fervent prayer, so that they and we may be kept from grievous sin, or, if they have already fallen, that they may do penance at once, and that we may help each other to persevere in good to the end of our lives, until we shall meet in the society of the elect in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

THE OBLIGATION OF FASTING.

"*When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards hungry.*" Matt. 4 : 2.

Terrible Lent, are you back again? Must we again suffer hunger? Alas, how will I be able to stand that? Forty whole days, one after the other! It is too much; I shall die before Easter! Such are the complaints I seem to hear from some over-delicate Christians, who regard the obligation of fasting as an unendurable one, and shrink from it as they would from being flayed alive. But be comforted : it will not kill you. There is no doubt

I. That we can and must fast for forty days; and

II. That vain are the pretexts of many sensual Christians, to escape the prescribed fast.

I. We are bound to observe the forty days' fast; the law binding Christians to that effect is clear and well-known throughout the

whole Catholic world. Neither is it a mere human law, nor an invention of the Popes, as some people imagine. But even if it were an invention of the Popes, and were imposed by them on the Church at large, would not that fact alone be a sufficient reason to make it obligatory on the conscience of every child of the Church? Not the least doubt of it. Nor is this law nearly as severe now as it was amongst the early Christians. The latter were obliged to abstain, not only from meat, but also from everything that comes from meat, such as eggs, milk, butter, etc.; and not merely from that, but even from fish, spices, and wine. Hence, there was hardly anything they could eat except bread, salt, oil, and vegetables, and that only once a day, in the afternoon, for they knew nothing of a collation, and their evening repast was kept as strictly in the bounds of moderation as our collation now is. No one dreamed of asking a dispensation.

And is there any modern Christian who will try to excuse himself by saying that he cannot observe the Lenten precept, easy as it is, now-a-days, or that he is not bound to do so? Consider the sin of our first parents in Paradise. The holy Fathers can hardly find words strong enough to express the fearful malice of this first sin, whose consequences we, unhappy descendants of Adam, still bewail in this vale of tears. And yet what was Adam's sin? He ate of a fruit that God had forbidden him to touch. That was all. Now, to eat a piece of fruit, nay, even a whole apple, is (if we consider the matter alone), a very trifling affair. Why, then, should such a sin be reckoned as a most grievous one in the divine judgments, as such a fearful sin, that no man can understand its malice? St. Thomas of Aquin tells us why. The gravity of this offence must be measured by its circumstances, and not by the smallness of its matter; and, according to those circumstances, that sin was a most grievous one. What were they? The manner and the words in which God imposed the command on Adam: "And he commanded him, saying: Of every tree of Paradise thou shalt eat: but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For in what day

soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death." It was as if God wished to say: All these things you can use when and how you please; but there is one tree that I reserve to myself, in order to test your obedience, and under pain of temporal and eternal death you are forbidden to taste of it. But what did Adam do? In the midst of the superabundant delights that were at his free disposal he stretched out his hand, in order to please his wife, to that one tree that he was forbidden to taste of under pain of death.

Now to our subject. Consider the vast number and variety of substances which God has prepared for the nourishment and food of man, in this, our earthly paradise? All kinds of crops in our fields, all kinds of fruit on our trees, all kinds of wholesome and nourishing vegetables in our gardens. And, then, what a great variety of animals, wild and tame, of birds, of domestic fowls, and of fishes in the waters. What a number of savory dishes can be made of those things that are procured from beasts! And the good God says, as it were, to each one of us Christians: Behold, all these things I give you to use as you please; eat and drink of them in moderation, when permissible, for the preservation of your strength and health. One article of food alone I reserve. You must now abstain from it for my sake, and that but for forty days. All the others, you can use once a day, till you are fully satisfied. Is it credible, my dear brethren, that any true Christian can be found to object to such a reasonable command as this, or to say that it is too difficult to be observed? I can hardly imagine that any one would be so rebellious as to violate the precept of God in his church by eating meat on a fast day or day of abstinence. And yet, alas, how many half-Catholics there are who refuse to observe this easy law! 'We are not bound to fast in that way," they say; nay: "We cannot fast in that way!" Let us hear now some of their

II. *Vain excuses.*

All Catholics under twenty-one years of age, people of advanced

age, laborers,the sick,the delicate, and the convalescent, pregnant and nursing mothers, all these have,indeed, good reason for saying that they cannot observe the law of fasting, at least as far as eating only one full meal in the day is concerned. Nowadays the sick and convalescent may even, if necessary, be dispensed from the precept of abstinence: such people being permitted to eat meat without violating the law of fasting. But alas ! how many other people there are, of both sexes, whose self-love furnishes them with all sorts of pretexts, to evade the Christian law of fasting. While I am willing to admit that we are not lords and masters, but rather caretakers of our health, our bodies, and our lives, and therefore, that we are not allowed to neglect them altogether,—it is also certain that we must care for the body only in so far as we may render it serviceable to the soul. Not our sensual appetites and our bodily comfort, but the eternal salvation of our immortal souls, should claim precedence in all things. How, then, can we dare to exempt ourselves from the observance of that precept of fasting that is given to all Christians in general ?

Even your physician has no power to dispense you from the law of fasting. All he can do, is to declare that you have a reasonable cause for asking a dispensation. If you are really as feeble as you declare ; if your stomach is in bad order ; if your head is so weak ; if you are really in danger of losing your health, and there is no other way of helping you, then, of course, says the doctor, you have good reason for asking a dispensation. But if your weakness is (as is generally the case), merely imaginary, if your fears are founded on self-love, sensuality, love of comfort, gluttony, and dread of self-denial and Christian mortification, then your dispensation, although a hundred doctors endorse it, is null and void in the sight of God. But (you say), I know by experience that fish is not good for me. Well, then, who compels you to eat fish ? Let it be, and eat something else. But that would be difficult and hard to do Quite so ; and that is precisely the reason of the law of fasting ; it must be hard and difficult.

Consider, I pray you, the vast numbers of poor people who, be-

sides having to work hard every day, hardly see a bit of meat oftener than once or twice a year, while they are just as badly off with regard to fish ; and yet they are able to enjoy good health on their fare of bread and vegetables. They can do without meat for a year at a time, while you are afraid to abstain from it for a few weeks during the Lent ! How many people there are, of both sexes, in convents and monasteries, who spend their whole lives without eating meat, or anything that comes from meat ; and yet they reach a ripe old age. St. Hilarion was eighty years old, St. Pachomius a hundred and ten, SS. Antony, Arsenius, and Romuald lived to be a hundred and twenty. And what ascetic lives they led ! Did they have meat outside of Lent ? Or fish prepared with all kinds of delicious sauces during Lent ? No, indeed ; dry bread, herbs, and vegetables were their food, pure water their drink, and even these things they did not eat their fill of, unless on some great feast days. Thus they fasted the whole year through, sleeping nightly but a few hours on the bare ground, and scourging and chastising their bodies in different ways. Yet, they enjoyed good health. Idle, self-indulgent worldlings, who among you, ever attains to such a hale old age, as the Fathers of the desert did, in spite of their fasting and austerities ? Yes, you reply : but people in those days were different. Yes, they were different ; they were more pious, God-fearing, and desirous of their salvation than we are. All that is required of you and me, O Christian, is to abstain from meat, and to eat a full meal but once a day, during Lent ; and behold ! we are so weak and delicate, that we must ask a dispensation in the very first week of Lent ! Ah ! immortified invalids, you have strength enough for many other things, far more injurious to the health than abstinence from meat ! For instance, you are invited to an evening party, at which you spend half the night eating, drinking, dancing, and otherwise amusing yourself ; so that it is quite late when you go home. Before accepting the invitation, do you go to consult the doctor as to whether it is good for your health to appear at such a party ? "What an extraordinary question !" you say : "Why

should I ask the doctor about such a thing?" But are you not afraid of getting ill, or of putting your head or stomach out of order, since you are so weak and delicate? Are you not afraid of injuring yourself by walking or driving through the cold air, late at night, in wind and rain, sleet and snow, depriving yourself at the same time of your night's rest? No, you say; I can endure that easily enough, and find a pleasure in it. Well, if such is the case, you must have a strong constitution! To get up an hour earlier than usual in the morning, and go through the cold air to Mass; to suffer some discomfort for the purpose of assisting at some public devotion on week-days, or at a sermon on Sundays, that, I am well aware, is bad for the health, and is sure to affect the head and the lungs injuriously; but I thought it was just as bad when one went out to parties in similar circumstances. "No," you answer; "I have never found that to be the case!" Truly, I see now that you must have a strong constitution indeed! And when you have spent four or five hours dancing, and go out of a warm room into the cold night air, and then into the warmth of your own house again, do you not find that injurious to your health? "No, not at all!" Wonderful, indeed, must your constitution be! And when you eat or drink to excess, or fill your stomach with all kinds of fruit, sweetmeats, liquors, and ices at entertainments, are your head and stomach always in good order? "Yes, I can bear all that without difficulty, nor does it make me the least ill." Certainly, you must be a very healthy person! For all doctors maintain that nothing is more injurious to the health than to eat and drink to excess, especially, when different kinds of food and drink are used at the same time. And some have told me, too, that there is nothing more apt to cause colds and catarrhs, than the night air, and sudden changes from heat to cold, and from cold to heat. "Let doctors say what they will, I have done it over and over again, and it has not hurt me!" Then, your constitution must be a very strong one!

But tell me, is not this constitution of yours the same during Lent? Up to Ash Wednesday, you have been so strong and

healthy that nothing could hurt you ; yet, now, you are so weak, that, if you abstain from meat for a time, you are sure to get sick ? Ah, Christians, is it possible that one can endure anything to please the world, or to gratify the senses and the desires of the flesh while, if there is question of obeying the law of God and the Church, all our strength is gone, the head is too weak, the stomach too delicate, we fear we may grow sick and die ?

But what will all these excuses avail before the omniscient God, who cannot be deceived, and who well knows what each one is able to bear ? What will they avail before that Judge of whom the prophet David says : "He shall judge the world with justice, and the people with his truth ?" (Ps. 95 : 13.) Mark these words, weak Christians ; in his own divine truth, he will judge the world, and not according to your idle imagination. You refuse to fast, you unlawfully eat flesh meat in order to preserve your health and prolong your life ; but have a care, lest, in punishment of your disobedience,God may deprive you of health and life together.

My dear Christians, unless evident necessity requires otherwise, let us strictly observe the law of God and of the Catholic Church. If self-love and sensuality try to persuade you that you cannot observe the general law of fasting, make them the same answer that St. Augustine once made in another matter : "Why should I not do what these men and women have done ?" So many Christians have kept the law of fasting for so many centuries, even when it was so strict that both fish and flesh were forbidden ; why, then, should I not observe it, now that it is made so easy ? So many religious of both sexes can fast during almost the entire year ; why should not I fast for forty days ? At all events, God has appointed the fast, and my mother, thy holy Church, has imposed it on her children ! This. alone, should induce me to show myself publicly her obedient child. And even if fasting should be somewhat more difficult to me than to others (who try to evade it by all sorts of vain pretexts), yet my soul and my flesh will have all the more consolation in God ; and when the joyful

season of Easter comes, I will be able to sing more heartily the glorious *Alleluia*. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT.

THE NECESSITY OF FASTING, AS A PENANCE.

"*There appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with him.*"
Matt. 17 : 3.

Why did our Saviour make choice of Moses and Elias, instead of so many other holy Patriarchs, as witnesses of his transfiguration and heavenly glory? St. Jerome answers: "Our Lord wishes to have Moses and Elias with him in his transfiguration, on account of their having united with him in fasting." Moses and the prophet Elias, each fasted forty days and nights consecutively, and therefore our fasting Redeemer, whom they had prefigured, wished them to share in his glory, in order to show the world that they who fast are the most fitted for the glory of heaven. My dear brethren, let us consider, to-day, that we are bound to observe the Lenten fast,

I. Because, as Christians, we are bound to do penance; and

II. Because, of all penitential works, fasting is the chief, the most suitable, and the most convenient for all men.

I. He who has sinned grievously must do penance; not merely the penance that the priest imposes on us in confession, for, generally speaking, it is so light, according to modern practice, that it scarcely deserves the name of penance. I speak now of that penance, of that special virtue, distinct from other virtues, which St. Thomas calls an act of justice, and whereby the repentant sinner pays his debt to God, and voluntarily punishes himself for the evil he has done. One or other of two things must be done, says St. Gregory, (speaking for the sinner): "Either God must punish me, and I must accept the punishment willingly, acknowledging my

guilt, or else I must perform works of penance according to the number of my sins, even if I were assured by a revelation that all my sins are forgiven. "I feared all my works," says holy Job, speaking to God, "knowing that thou didst not spare the offender" (Job 9 : 28). "Yes," comments St. Gregory, on those words: "God pardons the repentant sinner in so far that he receives him with joy again into his friendship, but he does not pardon him completely, so as to leave him altogether unpunished, because he does not permit sin to go unchastised, for, either the sinner inflicts punishment on himself, or God inflicts it on him."

Adam and Eve were pardoned by God for their disobedience, yet they and their descendants were condemned to hard work, to suffering, and to misery of all kinds. Again Moses, and Miriam, his sister, kings David and Ezechias were all examples of this truth in the Old Law ; whilst in the New, Magdalene and Peter were assured by Jesus Christ himself, that their sins were forgiven, yet their subsequent lives were most penitential.

But why speak only of sinners ? Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, incarnate holiness and innocence itself, lived and died a penitent. The holy Fathers ask why it is that our Lord, whose soul, from the first moment of his conception, enjoyed the beatific vision, did not also assume a glorious body, which certainly was due to his sacred humanity ? Why by a great and constant miracle, did the happiness of his soul impart no happiness to his body ? Why did nature behold in greatest amazement, united in the same Man, the highest dignity and the deepest abasement, superabundant wealth and extreme poverty, perfect happiness and the greatest misery, heavenly joys, and sorrow even to death ? Our Saviour came into the world as a willing victim to satisfy the divine justice for our sins, and as he assumed the figure and appearance of a sinner, it was not fitting for him to live in pomp and magnificence, in honor and glory before the world, and to lead a life of comfort and pleasure, but as a penitent, he had to endure punishment and trials, pains and torments, suffering and the cross. It was not becoming for him to bear our sins in his glory. Now, if Jesus Christ,

the innocent Son of God, who with even one sigh in a glorified body could have amply satisfied the justice of God for an infinite number of sins, if he spent his whole life in constant mortification of his body, because he had merely the figure and appearance of a sinner (voluntarily assumed in order to satisfy for the sins of others), how unjust and inconsistent it is for one who knows that he has committed grievous sins to lead a comfortable, easy life, and to avoid all bodily mortification. It remains true, then, that he who has sinned mortally, unless God mercifully punishes him in this life, must necessarily do penance and punish himself.

And who will dare to say that he has never sinned? If we had never done any evil whatever, original sin alone, in which we are conceived and born, would be a sufficient reason for doing penance all our lives. For it is in punishment for that sin that we are banished to this earth, this valley of tears, as the proper home of mortification and penance. How much more, then, are we not bound to do penance, when we consider the many actual sins we have committed in thought, word, deed, and omission, from the time when we first came to the use of reason.

Let no one say or think: I have sinned, I acknowledge it; I have sinned often and grievously; but I have long since repented, I have made a good confession, and I am firmly resolved never again during my whole life to offend God by mortal sin. Moreover, I will try to obtain remission of the punishment still due to my past sins, as well as of that which I deserve for my slight daily transgressions, by gaining indulgences, so that I do not stand in need of any special works of penance. Your conclusion does not hold good. You say that you have repented of and confessed your sins; and you have done perfectly right. You say that you are determined never to commit a mortal sin again Quite right. It would be a great mistake for you not to make such a resolution. You try to gain the indulgences that are so liberally granted now by our holy mother the Church. A very wise thing, indeed, for thereby you can blot out a part, or, if the indulgence is plenary, the whole of the punishment still due to your sins. But by

doing that, you do only one part of what the virtue of penance requires of you. Where is the other part? You must atone to God for the injury you have offered him, and you must punish your own wilfulness. This you cannot do by the mere purpose of not sinning again, or by gaining indulgences. It is by frequent mortification and voluntary penances, as St. Thomas of Aquin says, that you must fulfil this latter requirement of penance: "Satisfaction must be made by penitential works." But perhaps you do not know what penance to inflict on yourself? Learn then from this present holy season. Fast, at least, by way of satisfaction for your sins; and fast strictly, as becomes a Christian, and the law of the Church. For of all penitential works,

II. Fasting is the chief, the most suitable, and the most convenient for all men.

The belief that fasting is the chief penitential work, is grounded upon Holy Scripture which, in exhorting the sinner to do penance, almost always puts fasting in the first place. "Now, therefore," saith the Lord: "Be converted to me with all your hearts." In what manner? "In *fasting*, and in weeping, and in mourning" (Joel 2: 12)."Blow the trumpet in Sion,sanctify a fast (Ibid.15,16). "They proclaimed a fast, and put on sack-cloth from the greatest to the least" (Jon. 3: 5), was said of the penitent Ninivites. "They proclaimed a *fast* before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that were come together out of the cities of Juda to Jerusalem "(Jer. 36 : 9); was said of the penitent Israelites when the prophet Jeremias exhorted them to be converted from their wickedness. Again, when the prophet Samuel converted them from idolatry, the same Israelites "*fasted* on that day, and they said there: We have sinned against the Lord"(1 Kings 7: 6). We read of Achab that, when he was humbled, "he put hair-cloth upon his flesh, and *fasted*, and slept in sack-cloth, and walked with his head cast down"(3 Kings 21: 27). The penitent king David says of himself:"I humbled my soul with fasting"(Ps.34:13).

"My knees are weakened through *fasting*, and my flesh is changed for oil" (Ibid. 108 : 24). St. Paul makes the same confession of his own personal mortification : "In hunger and thirst, in *fastings* often"(2 Cor. 11: 27). Do you wish, says St. Ambrose, to know how to appease the God whom you have offended? "Then you must fast ; for fasting is a sacrifice of reconciliation, that blots out sin altogether."

Again, I have said, that fasting is the most suitable of all penitential works. Why? "That they might know," answers the Holy Ghost,"that by what things a man sinneth, by the same also he is tormented" (Wisd. 11 : 17). St. Paula of Rome, as St. Jerome tells us, used to scourge herself daily even to blood, while she constantly shed tears of contrition. If any one advised her to mitigate the severity of her penance she would answer: "The pleasures with which I formerly indulged my body must be paid for by these penances, and the laughing and amusements of my youth, by constant weeping." Now, since it was by gluttony that the first sin came into the world, so that, gluttony is the origin, so to speak, of all our sins, no more suitable satisfaction can be offered for them than fasting and abstinence. As we were driven out of Paradise with Adam, our first father, by gluttony and disobedience, he who wishes to regain Paradise must do so by fasting and obedience.

Finally, amongst all works of penance, fasting is the most convenient for all kinds of people. How so? Because it is feasible, it is inexpensive; nay more, it is economical, since a great deal of money, that would otherwise be spent on the pleasures of the table, is thereby saved. It is easy for the poor to fast, for they often have little or nothing to satisfy their hunger. Weak and delicate people, too, find fasting easy ; generally speaking, they have little appetite, and hardly strength enough to digest their food. Hard-working laborers, spend, so to speak, the greater part of their lives in fasting and abstinence ; for they have hardly anything to eat with their bread and water, unless, perhaps, a plate of vegetables cooked in fat. All these people fast and do penance

enough, if they only offer up to God by a supernatural intention their poverty and want, their sickness and delicacy, their labor and toil, their bad and insufficient nourishment, and the other trials they have to endure daily, humbly acknowledging that they deserve such trials on account of their former sins, and that they now bear them by way of atonement. Ah yes, good people; think of this daily; see that you have God as your Friend by having a good conscience, and do not forget the good intention, if you wish your troubles to be profitable to you.

There remain, then, only the wealthy and luxurious who fare abundantly and delicately every day, and lead easy, self-indulgent lives. What penance can such people perform in satisfaction for their sins? Hard beds, hair-disciplines, iron chains, or girdles? They shudder and protest at the bare mention of such things. Frequent fasting and abstinence are, therefore, the most convenient means of mortification and penance for such luxurious souls.

Tell me, in God's name, you who refuse to fast as you ought, although all are bound to it under pain of sin, in what have your necessary penances hitherto consisted? Perhaps in frequent vigils and interruptions of your night's rest? Yes, I quite believe that you have often done something of the kind in pleasant company, at evening parties, at balls and dances, to say nothing of things that are still worse; but is that the way to satisfy God for the injuries you have offered him, to punish yourselves for your sins, and blot out the chastisement due to them? If any one were to advise you to sacrifice a few hours of unnecessary sleep in order to go to Mass daily, oh, that (you urge), would be too much, altogether, to expect from you. "If I did that, you complain: my head would be heavy with sleep the whole day long, and I would not be able to attend to my business!" And yet, if you refuse to observe the Lenten fast, in what does your penance consist?

You must confess that you have often offended the great God. Have you at least borne with patience, and in atonement for your sins, those annoyances and trials that are common to all men, such as heat and cold, rain and wind, and the insults and trouble that

others sometimes cause you? Have you regarded them as a well-deserved punishment of your sins, saying, with Joseph's brethren in prison: "We deserve to suffer these things, because we have sinned against our brother" (Gen. 42 : 21). Yea, against our adorable Brother, Jesus Christ! Perhaps, on the contrary, you have regarded the least annoyance with displeasure; nay, have murmured against it, and given way to cursing and imprecations on account of it, thus increasing the punishment due to your sins, while in other things, in eating, drinking, sleeping, resting, in dress and in entertainments, you have always sought your own comfort, and tried to gratify your sensuality. And yet you wish to evade the law of fasting?. Yet you pretend you must eat flesh-meat, and have a full, or at least a half meal in the evening, lest you should suffer from the want of food, or injure your health? Where, then, I again ask, is your penance? Where the atonement to God for the injuries you have offered him? Where the punishment of your repeated revolts against him? Self-indulgent, pampered Christians! will you not be afraid to appear before your crucified Judge, who taught men by word and example, that violence alone can carry off the kingdom of heaven? Do you, perhaps, wish to leave the punishment of your sins till the next life? Ah, woe to you, if so; for far more terrible instruments of penance and a more rigorous fast await you there! How will you be able to endure them, if you now find it so hard to fulfil the easy law of fasting?

Oh! no, my beloved, acknowledge your guilt; humbly confess that you have sinned, sinned often, sinned grievously, and declare your willingness to do penance. Continually mortify your flesh and its concupiscences, and bear patiently all the trials and crosses of this life. If not reasonably dispensed, strictly observe the fast of Lent, escaping by that slight penance the well-deserved and severe torments of the next life, hoping to arrive, one day, at your heavenly Home, where, according to God's promise, all his children will feed at his bounteous banquet for all eternity. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT.

THE NECESSITY OF FASTING IN ORDER TO AVOID SIN.

"When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth." Luke 11 : 21.

"When a strong man armed keepeth his court," says our dear Lord, "those things are in peace which he possesseth." What arms are we to use, besides prayer, in order to obtain this much desired peace? Fasting and abstinence, of which we have treated already during this holy season, are the chief, the most suitable, and the most convenient arms for this purpose, for all classes of men. Fasting not only blots out past sins, but also preserves us from future sins. Hence,

I. If there were no obligation to fast, all men would still be bound to fast, in order to be preserved from sin and saved from its punishments; and hence, also,

II. All who are able, should observe the Lenten fast.

I. Mankind, in the sight of God, may be divided into two classes, innocent or just, and transgressors. Both are bound to do penance, as was declared by those two chief preachers of mortification in the Gospel, Jesus Christ and his holy precursor, John the Baptist. John went about everywhere crying out: "Do penance for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3 : 2). Christ followed him, saying: "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13 : 3). The first exhorts men to penance by holding out to them the hope of reward, by reminding them of the future joys of heaven; the second urges them to penance by the terrible threat of eternal destruction. Their words were directed to the whole world: to the just and innocent, who are easily moved to do virtuous actions by hope and charity, and to wicked sinners, who must be violently urged

thereto by fear. The just must do penance, that they may be preserved from sin; the wicked, that they may cease from sin, or, if they are already converted, that they may not relapse into sin.

The just and innocent, who are in the minority among adults, stand in need of penance as a preservative against sin. No matter how good they are, how deeply grounded in the love of God, or in their resolution never to offend him, they are still but human. Weak, frail, and instable creatures, as they are, the greatest care is requisite to preserve to themselves the costly treasure of divine grace. This is the meaning of the words addressed by the Church to her faithful children when she distributes the ashes at the beginning of Lent: "Remember, man, that thou art dust." As if she wished to say: Take care, O mortal! Be on your guard! Hitherto, you may have been immovable and strong as a pillar in the house and service of God, yet remember you are but dust, ready to be blown away by the first wind. Therefore, strengthen yourself with the weapons of the spirit, and chastise your body by fasting and penance.

The first sin in paradise was a violation of the law of fasting. From that hour when our first parents rebelled against God, the flesh, with its concupiscences and inordinate appetites, rebels against sound reason, and to such an extent, that man's understanding is darkened in supernatural things, his inclinations tend to evil, his will is weak and sluggish in good; and it is only by a great effort that it can be urged to well-doing, or restrained from evil. The guilt of original sin is thoroughly washed away by the waters of holy baptism, yet concupiscence, (which theologians call "the source of sin,") still retains possession of us, and from it arise all temptations, the devil making use of our own flesh and its desires as instruments and abettors to drag the soul into sin. All this is described in a few words, by St. James: "From whence are wars and contentions among you?" he questions. "Are they not hence, from your concupiscences, which war in your members?" (Jas. 4: 1.) Therefore, you need not go far to find the cause of the strife; it is the enemy within the walls.

Now, the more liberty is allowed to the flesh and its desires, the more it is permitted to enjoy itself, even in lawful things, the more delicately it is nourished, the more obstinate will it become in its rebellion against the spirit, and the more difficult will it be for sound reason to rule it and to keep it within the bounds of God's commandments. It is like a restive horse, which, when kept a long time in the stable and well-fed, can be tamed afterwards only with great difficulty. Not without reason is that source of sin in our flesh called, "the fire of concupiscence." The more wood you put on a fire, the greater the heat, and the higher the flames. Pour oil on it, and you will have great difficulty in preventing the whole house from catching fire. To pamper the body, to eat, drink, and sleep according to our desires, is nothing else than to add fuel to the fire of concupiscence; to pour oil on the flame. Again, a full stomach is an incentive to lust. Lust is fed by feasting and nourished by pleasure, it is kindled by wine and inflamed by drunkenness. This fire, then, must often be kept under, even by the innocent and the just, or else it will break out into a flame, most dangerous to the soul. This restive horse must frequently be worked, and kept on short rations, if he is to remain obedient to his master, "Reason."

Yes, the most suitable, the safest and the most powerful of all the works of penance is that prescribed to us by the Catholic Church, namely, fasting, and frequent abstinence from food and drink. The Church forbids the use of flesh-meat during Lent, "that our flesh may be subject to the spirit, and our appetites to reason." The chief object of fasting is to subdue the desires of the flesh, for chastity is preserved by fasting. St. Ambrose expresses the same idea in the beautiful words that priests read at Prime in the divine Office: "May abstemiousness in eating and drinking subdue the pride of the flesh." What is meant by the pride of the flesh? Is not pride only a spiritual vice? How, then, can it be ascribed to the flesh? With very good reason, for is it not pride for the subject to command his sovereign? the servant, his master? the maid, her mistress? Now what is our

flesh? A miserable creature, of vile origin, made of a lump of earth at first, and given over to the reasoning soul to be its servant. Yet, we learn by daily experience, that the flesh arrogates a right over the soul, and frequently importunes it to consent to its wanton desires; nay, it often causes the reasoning soul to obey its sensuality. Is not that an intolerable pride? And what arms shall we take up to tame it? Fasting, abstinence, abstemiousness in eating, can and must subdue this pride and wilfulness of the flesh.

As long as Adam observed the abstinence imposed on him by God, he remained a beloved friend of God, but when he followed his inordinate appetites by eating the forbidden fruit, he became a slave of the devil. While he was fasting, he was in Paradise, but hardly had he eaten, when he was cast forth. "Therefore," says St. Ambrose, "no better means of defence can be found, than fasting, against the attacks of the hellish serpent." St. Augustine, commenting on the words of Christ to his disciples, explaining to them why they could not cast out a certain kind of devil, "This kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17 : 20). "See," he says, "how powerful fasting is; it can do what was impossible to the Apostles."

This is the reason why even the most innocent and holy friends of God, fasted so rigorously. According to the testimony of Athanasius, St. Anthony fasted so strictly during his whole life, that sometimes, he neither ate nor drank for two or three days together, and then, on the fourth day, took only a small piece of bread. While Hilarion was still a young man of fifteen, he fasted just as strictly; he never ate till sundown, and then nothing but a few dried figs; nay, he often went four whole days without food or drink of any kind, so that he was sometimes hardly able to breathe, through hunger and exhaustion. St. Ambrose, as bishop, was for many years accustomed to eat but once a day, and then very little. The holy cardinal, Charles Borromeo, although he was delicately nurtured, always abstained from meat, fish, eggs, and wine; and during the last years of his life he used to take nothing but dry

bread and water. Aloysius, who was more like an angel than a human being in innocence, used to weigh his food most accurately every day, lest he should give his body more nourishment than was necessary to preserve its life for the service of God. In a word, among all who were remarkable for sanctity, we read of none who attained it without fasting. Let no one imagine that those Saints fasted so rigorously merely in order to serve God more perfectly, and to gain more glory in heaven. Truly, that was one reason why they did it, but there was another, besides; they regarded fasting as necessary, for, like other poor mortals, they had to groan and sigh under the slavery of their corrupt flesh, and so they had recourse to fasting, in order to tame its wanton desires and make it submit to reason, lest, if overcome, they should lose their innocence and holiness. They knew well that, in order to preserve sanctifying grace in their souls, they required a special, powerful, helping grace from God, and they acknowledged that, as long as they continued to do penance, so long would they receive the help of this grace.

Attend to this all you, who pamper your bodies, seek your comfort in all things, gratify your sensuality in eating and drinking, and when Lent comes on, bring forward all kinds of empty pretexts, to excuse yourself from observing the fast; who do not wish to hear a word about Christian mortification and crucifying the flesh, to which our Lord himself so frequently exhorts all men. Under such circumstances, how can you reasonably expect to keep your soul free from other sins, to which the wanton and unmortified flesh is sure to tempt them?

St. Luke describes, in a few words, the eternal ruin of the rich glutton: "And the rich man also died; and he was buried in hell" (Luke 16: 22). Why? What wrong had he done? Was he, perhaps, guilty of idolatry, or sacrilege? Was he a revengeful man, and a murderer? Or an adulterer, or perchance, a thief? No; we read nothing of the kind in the Gospel. And in what, then, did his guilt consist? Hear the reason why the divine and all-just Judge condemned him: "He was clothed in purple and

fine linen; and feasted sumptuously every day" (Luke 16: 19). That was all; yet it was enough to condemn him in the next life to eternal torments, as we see from the words of St. Luke: "and he was buried in hell;" and from the answer that Abraham made to his complaints in the midst of his intolerable sufferings: "Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime" (Ibid. 25). Remember what an easy life you had, and therefore, you are now "tormented." But, you will ask, what is the harm in being well-dressed, in eating and drinking well every day, and enjoying one's self lawfully? That is the usual mode of life of those who can afford to live in that way. I have nothing to say as to the mode of life common in the world; but the Holy Ghost tells me, "Go not after thy lusts; but turn away from thy own will;" for, "if thou give to thy soul her desires, she will make thee a joy to thy enemies" (Ecclus. 19: 30,31). If you make a rule of doing and enjoying everything that is lawful and agreeable, you will not be long without doing something that is unlawful and forbidden, until at last you will enter on the broad and pleasant way that leads to destruction.

II. Therefore, dear Christians, no matter how innocent you are, if you wish to conquer temptation, and preserve yourselves free from sin, you must often mortify your flesh, and especially by frequent fasting and abstinence. What does a gardener do to preserve the good seed he has planted from being eaten up by the birds? He covers the earth with sharp thorns to keep the birds away. That was what the penitent David did, in order to preserve his soul from the attacks of the hellish birds of prey: "I covered my soul in fasting" (Ps. 48. 11), an example we should do well to follow. And the same holy doctor writes: "Hunger is a friend of purity, an enemy of lust; while satiety ruins chastity and nourishes concupiscence."

Now, listen to reason. If an innocent man, who has never tasted a forbidden pleasure, nor transgressed the law of God, must still fast and do penance, in order to avoid sin and overcome

temptation, how much more necessary must not fasting be to him who has sinned grievously, and who, on account of his former bad habits, is powerfully inclined to sin? For, just as Baptism, although it cleanses the soul from the stain of original sin, still leaves the flesh rebellious against the spirit, so, also, the Sacrament of Penance, although it removes the stain of actual guilt from the soul, leaves behind it two other terrible effects of sin, which the Council of Trent denominates "the relics of sin."

The first is a certain facility and audacity in relapsing into sin. The second, the rebellion and disobedience of the carnel appetites, which become more headstrong and obstinate in proportion to the amount of indulgence conceded them, so that the spirit is weakened and is less able to control them. Hence it happens, that one falls so easily and at the first temptation into his former abominations, and comes to confession with nearly the same sins each time, unless he is particularly careful and does violence to himself constantly. A converted sinner is like a convalescent patient, who is recovering from an attack of fever. He does not suffer so much as during his illness, but for a long time, he feels a weakness and lassitude in his limbs, and if he is not careful and moderate in what he eats and drinks, he runs a great risk of falling sick again. Oh, what manifold mortifications such a person is obliged to practi e! How often is he not compelled to abstain from food for which his mouth waters! How often and how unwillingly must he not, quit the table without having fully satisfied his hunger! And if he refuses to do so, he is at once reproved by those around him: "If you go on like that," they say, "you will soon see how it will end with you!" Why, O Christians, are people so careful of the health of the body, while they do so little to keep the precious soul from relapsing into its former maladies? If we can deny ourselves food or drink of which we are very fond for the sake of the body, should we not be much more willing to fast and to overcome ourselves for the sake of the immortal soul?

For that is the way in which to destroy, little by little, those rel-

ics of sin, and it is prescribed to penitents by the Council of Trent as a most efficacious means to that end. How greatly mistaken, then, are those penitents who, when they have got rid of the heavy burden of their sins at Easter, think and say: "Thank God, that much is done! I am free from that burden. I have confessed all my sins, and performed my penance. I can now enjoy myself in peace." And they proceed to live as if they had never done any wrong. Ah! you must know that you have not yet done enough for your soul. If you have made a good confession, the unclean spirit is certainly driven out of you; the house is swept and garnished. But be careful. What did you hear in to-day's Gospel? "I will return," says the unclean spirit who has been banished: "I will return into my house whence I came out. Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and entering in they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

Can one who has often sinned and often relapsed after confession reasonably hope to be able to withstand temptation amid the countless dangers and occasions to which he is exposed by an easy, comfortable life, by pampering his body in every way, and eating and drinking as he pleases? Considering the words of St. Paul, "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection; lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway" (1 Cor. 9: 27), and (that chastising of the body consisted principally in fasting and abstinence), considering these words, St. Chrysostom cries out with a deep sigh: "If Paul was so much afraid of sin and reprobation," although he had so often bewailed and done penance for the sins of his life, and had labored more than the other Apostles for the honor of Jesus Christ; although he had converted so many souls by his preaching, and had become, as it were, an angel in the flesh; if St. Paul still thought it necessary to chastise his body by fasting, alas, "What have we to say for ourselves?" What ought not we to do, in order to avoid sin and eternal damnation! Do we still venture to say: "I cannot fast; I must have meat. I must have a full meal in the evening,

or else I shall become too weak. I shall not be able to sleep, and my health will suffer!" ?

Away with those deceits and false excuses of sensuality! The health of my soul should certainly be dearer to me than the welfare of my mortal body ; and if I cannot preserve it unless I chastise the body by fasting, abstinence, and works of penance, then I am fully determined that the body must suffer. Far be it from me to make use of any pretext whatever to evade the Lenten fast. No ; I will fast strictly. Not only will I deprive my stomach of flesh-meat, but my whole body shall have its share of mortification. My eyes, my ears, my tongue, my hands shall fast, that they may neither see, hear, say, nor touch what might be even a remote danger or occasion of sin to them, so that, being thus always armed against my enemy, I shall be able to keep my soul and its salvation in peace. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

THE NECESSITY OF ALMS-GIVING FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF SIN.

"*Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?*" John 6 : 5.

"Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" My brethren, whence shall we buy bread to feed the poor and needy in our neighborhood ? This is a subject highly deserving of your attention during these days of Lent. Good and salutary as is the law of fasting in itself, yet the Catholic Church does not command her children to fast merely that they may abstain from meat, and eat a full meal but once a day. Amongst other reasons, the Lenten fast is imposed, that what the stomach is deprived of may be given to the poor ; that while the stomach is fasting from its ordinary food, the hand may busy itself in generosity to the needy. Hence, they who are blessed by God with wealth are not less

obliged to perform the corporal works of Christian charity during Lent, than those who are in good health and strength are bound to do works of penance. Nay, there is no use in fatiguing the body by depriving it of food, unless, at the same time, the members of Jesus Christ, that is, the poor, are fed and nourished by alms-deeds. Therefore, besides fasting, we must also give alms according to our means.

I. In atonement for our past sins; and

II. As a preservative against future sins.

I. Alms-giving should always accompany fasting; for, it is certain, that of all penitential works none is more efficacious in appeasing God's anger and obtaining a remission of the punishment still due to our sins, than pure-intentioned alms-giving and generosity to the poor and needy.

This is emphatically and expressly declared in the Holy Scripture by God himself, so that to doubt it would be to call in question the very word of God. "Charity covereth all sins" (Prov. 10 : 12). Again : "Before all things, have a constant mutual charity amongst yourselves." Why ? "for charity covereth a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4 : 8), so that, even the most grievous sins, when covered by works of charity and mercy, are, as it were, not considered nor punished by God. The elder Tobias, when exhorting his son, recommended him especially to practise charity towards the poor and needy : "For alms deliver from all sin and death" (Tob. 4 : 11). The same was afterwards affirmed by the archangel Raphael : "For alms delivereth from death, and the same is that which purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting" (Ibid. 12 : 9). "Give alms," says Christ himself to the wicked Scribes and Pharisees ; "and behold all things are clean unto you" (Luke 11 : 41).

St. Ambrose, considering those words : "Water quencheth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sins" (Ecclus. 3 : 33) ; compares

alms-giving with the Sacrament of Baptism, and says, alms-giving blots out sin, just as Baptism extinguishes the fire of hell. Oh, what a good and gracious God we have, he continues ; how many powerful means he has supplied us with to enable us to save our souls easily ! He has instituted the Sacrament of Baptism, which not only blots out the guilt, but also takes away all the punishment due to all the sins that one has committed. But if a poor, weak mortal offends God grievously after Baptism, and thus again deserves the eternal torments of hell, behold, he has two other means at hand to free himself from sin ; the one, the Sacrament of Penance, which takes away the guilt of sin, and the other, alms-giving, which remits the punishment due to it.

The reason of all this is evident. It is an every day saying that Money can do anything. Hence, in the Old Law, God gave this command to judges : "Thou shalt not accept person nor gifts." And he immediately adds the reason : "for gifts blind the eyes of the wise, and change the words of the just" (Deut. 16 : 19). No matter how pious or just a judge may be, if he accepts a bribe, then good-bye to his justice ; his eyes are blinded to the guilt of a criminal ; his ears are closed, so that he cannot hear any accusation against him ; his hands are tied, and he cannot punish the malefactor as he deserves ; his mouth is shut, and cannot pronounce a just sentence. Alas, this is but too true !

Now, what do I mean by all this ? Dare we, then, venture to help our case before the divine tribunal with money and presents, so as to gain something to which we have no right ? Not a doubt of it. St. John Chrysostom gives an apposite answer, and cries out in astonishment : "O wonderful power of alms-giving ! It creeps into the divine tribunal, and there enables us to meet our Judge without fear." For Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead, stretches forth his hand whenever we give anything to the poor in his name. He it is, who takes the bread, the money, or whatever other gift we bestow, as we know from his own lips : "As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25 : 40).

Thus he allows himself to be bribed by the sinner, so that he has no eyes to see his sins, in order to punish them; no tongue to pronounce against him the sentence of eternal death; and no hands to inflict on him the chastisement he so well deserves. The alms he has received, converts him from a bitter enemy into the dear friend of the sinner. "Give alms and behold all things are clean unto you;" give alms, and you will thereby make up for everything.

That was the way in which David tried to make good his cause with the God whom he had offended, as he says himself: "I will wash my hands among the innocent" (Ps. 25: 6). But David, what are you thinking of? Will you wash among the innocent those hands that are stained with the filth of adultery, and with the blood of Urias? Will you cleanse them so that they will resemble those of an innocent man? Yes; so clean will I wash them, by giving generous alms to the poor. "I will cleanse my works from the stain of sin, in the laver of alms-giving." In the same way, too, the otherwise impious emperor Zeno succeeded in bribing the Almighty God, so that he escaped the punishment he had long deserved. Baronius, writing of the year 474, relates that a certain poor woman, whom this emperor had persecuted most unjustly, threw herself on her knees before a picture of the Mother of God, and cried out: "Avenge me on Zeno!" Whereupon, the Blessed Virgin answered her: "Believe me, I have not been careless of your interests all this time, and would long ago have inflicted the desired punishment on him; but his hand prevents me." "For he was," says the historian, "very charitable and good to the poor."

Hear, O sinners, you, who on account of the multitude and deformity of your crimes despair of finding mercy and grace at the hands of God, take courage! No matter how great your wickedness, how numerous your sins; not one of you has cause to despond, much less to despair. Only give alms according to your means, and you will find it a most powerful means of obtaining the grace of repentance and God's forgiveness for your

sins. King Nabuchodonosor, who was a monster of wickedness, when the prophet Daniel announced to him, in the name of God, the dreadful punishment that was in store for him, could (if he had followed the Prophet's advice), have escaped that punishment by the same means; for Daniel said to him: "Wherefore, O King, let my counsel be acceptable to thee." And what was this counsel? "Redeem thou thy sins with alms, and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor: perhaps, he will forgive thy offenses" (Dan. 4: 24). Read the Gospel of St. Luke, and there see how Jesus Christ condemns the Pharisees and their hideous vices. "Woe to you, Pharisees!" (Luke 11: 44), he says frequently; woe to you, hypocrites! "because you are as sepulchres that appear not" etc. (Ibid.). They are several times condemned and rejected most vehemently. And why? Was there no means of salvation for them? Certainly there was. What was it? Our Lord himself tells them: "But yet that which remaineth, give alms: and behold all things are clean unto you" (Ibid. 41). As if he meant, this is the only chance of salvation remaining for you; give alms and be generous to the poor So powerful is alms-giving in appeasing the anger of God, and in blotting out or warding off the punishment due to our sins. But it is not less powerful with regard to the other object for which fasting is useful, namely,

II. To keep our evil inclinations in check, to gain the favor and friendship of God, and to be freed from further sin, and eternal damnation.

After the concupiscence of the flesh, there is no greater source of sin than the concupiscence of the eyes, the inordinate desire of possessing and increasing one's store of worldly goods, which is called Avarice. If the heart of man is once taken up with this passion, then farewell to devotion, piety, the fear of God, and justice. For there is no law so holy, that the miser is not ready to violate for the sake of money; no sin so great, that he is not willing to commit, if he can add to his store thereby. "Nothing is more wicked than the covetous man," says the Holy Ghost by

the wise Ecclesiasticus : "There is not a more wicked thing than to love money ; for such a one setteth even his own soul to sale; because while he liveth, he hath cast away his bowels" (Ecclus. 10 : 9, 10). The miser forgets his own salvation; he forgets all about the kingdom of heaven, for which he is created ; he forgets his God and his Creator. Money is his heart, his soul, his only good, his god. And the worst and most dangerous characteristic of this vice is that there is hardly any means of healing it, once it has taken possession of the heart ; for the inordinate desire of wealth cannot be satisfied even by the possession of that which it seeks. The more it has, the more it desires ; the greater its wealth, the more eager its efforts to accumulate; and while nearly all the other vices decrease with old age, when health and strength begin to fail, avarice grows stronger, and follows a man even to the grave. Therefore it must be a great benefit for the soul to have found a remedy against this vice, for that remedy is also a preservative against countless sins. Is not that so, my dear brethren?

This most powerful remedy is charity and mercy towards the poor. Generosity is a virtue directly opposed to avarice ; since it, perforce, takes away the object of concupiscence of the eyes, that is, money and worldly goods, and gives it to others. Now, there can be no better and holier generosity than that which is exercised towards our Lord himself in the person of the poor, by alms-giving. Therefore, he who is charitable to the poor and bestows on them generous alms, sharing his worldly goods with them, has certainly overcome the concupiscence of the eyes, and with it, temptations to many sins and vices. And, as to gaining the favor and friendship of God, and being preserved from further sin and from eternal damnation, who can promise himself that with greater confidence than the generous alms-giver? "Alms shall be a great confidence before the most high God, to all them that give it" (Job 4 : 12), says Tobias to his son ; therefore, my son, if you wish to be a friend of God, follow my advice, and "give alms out of thy substance, and turn not away thy face from any poor person" (Ibid.).

If an angry God allows himself to be bribed by the alms of a great sinner, and if he is appeased to such an extent, that he is ready to forget his transgressions, and (so to speak), is compelled to give him the grace of repentance, and to remit a great part of the punishment due to his sins, how will not that good and just God be influenced by the alms-giving of one who is already in the state of grace? Can that God, who never allows himself to be outdone by his creatures in generosity, and who expressly says to us: "Give, and it shall be given to you" (Luke 6 : 38), can he, I ask, refuse any favor to him who shares his worldly goods with God's poor children? Could a generous alms-giver be condemned to the everlasting flames of hell by that faithful God, who has declared that, at the Last Day the claim of his elect to his eternal kingdom shall depend upon the diligent and pure-intentioned performance of works of Christian charity? "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you; . . . for I was hungry, and you gave me to eat" (Matt. 25 : 34, 35). No; there is no place in hell for the generous alms-giver. "For," continues Tobias, "alms deliver from all sin and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness" (Tob. 4 : 11). When the city of Sodom was destroyed by fire from heaven on account of its horrible crimes, Lot alone, with his family, was led out of it in safety by the Angels. How did he merit that favor? By his generous alms-giving, for Lot received the Angels into his house, under the appearance of poor wanderers, and entertained them hospitably. The divine fire cannot burn mercy; therefore, let him who wishes to have no reason to fear the flames of hell practise mercy.

Oh, if many of the elect could tell you how they escaped the fire of hell and gained the happiness of heaven, you would indeed, be convinced of the truth of this! St. Peter Damian tells us of a nobleman in Germany who, as he was out hunting one cold winter's day, found a poor, ill-clad widow and her daughter trudging bare-foot through the snow. Filled with pity for the poor people, he took one of them up on his horse and commanded his servant to take up the other; and so they went on, till they came to an

inn, where the nobleman caused the two women to be well looked after, and before he went away he gave the mother his own cloak, that she might have some protection against the bitter cold. This act of charity soon met with its evident reward. The nobleman received the grace of a religious vocation, in pursuance of which he left his servants all he possessed in the world, and retired into a monastery, there to serve God for the rest of his life. Not many years after, he fell dangerously ill, and as he was in his death-agony, he commenced to cry out most piteously to the brethren who were standing round : "Help me ! Do you not see what a swarm of raging demons are waiting for my poor soul to carry it off to hell ?" The brethren began to pray, and tried to console the dying man by telling him to despise the temptations of the Evil One, and to put his trust in God ; but all to no purpose. At last, the dying man turned to him who had formerly been his servant on the hunting expedition : "Look," said he to him with a cheerful countenance, "do you not see the woman whom I took up behind me on my horse that day ? She is standing by my bedside, holding in her hand the mantle I gave her to protect her from the cold. The moment she entered the room, all the demons took to flight at once ; and now, as a reward for my charity, she has invited me to enter into heaven." Having said these words, he gave up his happy soul.

If we were all to look back on our past lives, we should find a great many sins and transgressions of the divine law, for which we are still indebted to the justice of God. Therefore, we have good reason to fear that in those dangerous and troublous times, we shall have some calamity to suffer. If we consider our future lives, we must humbly acknowledge that we are in need of a special grace of God, in order to be preserved from sin ; and (what is all-important), to be saved from an unhappy death and eternal damnation. Now, we have a sure means of securing both those objects in generous alms-giving and in Christian charity towards the poor. Let us, then, constantly practise this virtue according to our means, and thus bribe our divine Judge to forget

our sins, and, if we have not yet repented, to give us the grace of true contrition. By the same means, too, we shall make sure of the friendship of the Most High, so that he will keep us from sin, and will protect us in our last moments from the attacks of the Evil One. A certain rich man being dangerously ill, was warned that it was time for him to give up all unnecessary cares for earthly things, to raise his mind to heaven, and prepare for eternity. "Ah," sighed he, "I see the gate of heaven far off, but I see, too, that it is bolted against me. Who will open it to me, that I may enter?" Such thoughts and words are not unusual with dying people, when they feel the approach of death. And a voice replied to him: "Take your money and make for yourself gold and silver keys, with which you will be able to open a thousand locks. But in order that those precious keys may not be lost, commit them to the charge of the poor. They will keep them safe for you, and will give them over to you without fail at the gate of heaven." The same advice I give to all who are in a position to help the poor. There are some, perhaps, who cannot fast, let them at least open their purse-strings to feed Christ in the person of his poor. Certainly we have abundant opportunities to manifest our generosity. Hundreds suffer the pangs of hunger, either in the public streets or in their own houses, where they cry for bread with their famished children. There are plenty of good and needy people, who, with tears in their eyes, pray for the necessaries of life, and often cannot get them. Ah, be merciful and help these worthy people! I repeat to you the advice of Tobias to his son: "According to thy ability be merciful; if thou have much, give abundantly; if thou have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little; for thus thou storest up to thyself a good reward for the day of necessity, that is, for the end of thy life." Christians, let us all profit by this good advice; and we may hope thereby to be freed from the punishment due to our sins, and, that, some day, after our death, the very same poor whom we have helped in this life will, according to the promise of our Lord, receive us into eternal tabernacles. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

THE BLINDNESS AND OBDURACY OF THE SINNER, A PUNISHMENT OF SIN.

"*Therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God.*" John 8 : 47.

What terrible words these are! "He that is of God heareth the words of God. Therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God." To be abandoned by God, to have no part in him, to die in their wickedness, and to be lost forever, this was the most fearful punishment inflicted on the Jews ; and it was one that our Lord had often foretold to them with tears in his eyes, namely, that they should become blind and obstinate, and should be rejected by God. There are three kinds of spiritual blindness. The first flies the light so as to have no knowledge of good and evil; the second consists in a culpable ignorance of the divine law and of the duties of a Christian. Of the third I shall now proceed to speak, explaining:

I. The nature of this divinely inflicted blindness; and

II. That as a punishment, this is the most dreadful of all evils.

I. The terrible spiritual blindness of which I speak to you arises from the habitual commission of grievous sin. It is called a blinding of the understanding and a hardening of the will in wickedness; and it comes to those who refuse to hearken to the voice of God calling them to repentance. "But if thou will not hear the voice of the Lord thy God, the Lord strike thee with madness and blindness and fury of mind, and mayest thou grope at midday as the blind is wont to grope in the dark, and not make straight thy ways" (Deut. 28 : 15, 28). Of this blindness, St. Paul says: "Because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified him as God . . .their foolish heart was darkened . . . God

delivered them up to a reprobate sense, to do those things which are not convenient." With this blindness and obduracy, God justly punished king Pharao, who had so often disobeyed him. The plagues he had to suffer only made him more obstinate in refusing to obey the divine command, and let the people of Israel go; but when at length he did let them go, he repented of having done so, pursued them with his whole army, ventured rashly into the Red Sea, in the face of an evident miracle wrought in favor of the Israelites, and was drowned with all his followers. The same blindness was inflicted by God on the obstinate Jews. Yes, it is even the infinitely good and merciful God who thus severely punishes man, when he has borne with his sins for a long time, and often exhorted and warned him to no purpose. Nor is this punishment too severe, it is in accordance with the strictest justice; "for it is a most just punishment of sin that one should lose that which he would not make a good use of . . . and that he who deliberately omits to do good, should at last neither know nor understand what good is."

But that no one may have a mistaken idea of the mercy of God in this matter, as if he deliberately planned the eternal ruin of a man by increasing his guilt, you must not forget how this punishment of blindness and obduracy is inflicted by God. Our God is infinitely good, and patient, and merciful; he never abandons man unless the latter abandon him for too long a time altogether. He does not and cannot wish any one to commit sin, nor can he, nor will he condemn any one to hell who does not himself elect to go there; he rejects no sinner, no matter how great his guilt may be, who does true penance; and he is prepared to receive into his friendship even the most wicked sinner who does penance even at the last moment of his life. Such is the teaching of the infallible word of God in Holy Scripture; such, too, is the experience of many great sinners. If God intended first to abandon us, why did he send his Only-begotten Son down on earth to redeem all men, and show them the way to heaven? Why should that Son have allowed himself to be so cruelly tortured, and to be

nailed to the cross for our sake? No, once for all, it is and must be true, that the good God does not wish the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live. But now, see how he allows the sinner to become blind and obdurate. In order to avenge himself for the contempt with which he has been persistently treated, he withdraws from the obstinate sinner the graces that he is not at all bound to give him, and which he has hitherto bestowed on him solely out of the superabundance of his goodness; such graces as a clear knowledge of Gospel truths, and vivid lights in the understanding, making him see and dread the malice, deformity and eternal punishment of sin. Neither does God any longer give him those refreshing impulses and sweet inward movements of the will, enabling one to keep his law with ease, to mortify sensuality and evil inclinations, perform the works of Christian piety and charity, bear crosses and trials patiently, and find an efficacious strength in all dangers. Withdrawing these graces from the obstinate sinner, God delivers him over to his own desires and inclinations, as he says by the prophet David, "My people heard not my voice: and Israel hearkened not to me. So I let them go according to the desires of their heart; they shall walk in their own inventions." And they will do all that sensuality and their own will may suggest to them.

Now, when these graces are thus withdrawn from the sinner and he is given over to his own desires, what happens to him? Alas, the same that happened to our dear Lord, when Pilate delivered him over to the will of the Jews; they fell upon him like wolves, dragged him off to Calvary, and there cruelly murdered him. O sinner, are you given over to your own evil inclinations? Alas, what will become of you? Nothing else can be the result but that your understanding will be blinded and your will hardened. For when those special graces of God no longer impel you to good and restrain you from evil, if the least temptation or occasion of sin, such as we are daily exposed to, assails you, you will consent to it without the least hesitation, fear, or shame; from one sin you will fall into another, from that into a third, and so

on, until your sins are beyond counting. If you throw a stone into a pond, it will at once make a circle in the water; this circle will make another, the other a third, and so it goes on until the last circle is so far away that it vanishes out of sight. So it is also with the heart of the wicked man, which the Holy Scripture compares to a stormy sea. "But the wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest." First comes the habit of sin; from the habit, a concatenation of vices, an ever increasing circle of abominations, a deplorable ebb and flow of sin, and finally, a natural necessity, as it were of sinning, so that it is almost impossible to the sinner to amend. His sins cease only with his life.

A dislike for everything good; a disgust for prayer, the holy Sacraments and all works of devotion; an abuse or a lack of relish for the word of God, an increasing desire and inordinate love of temporal goods, like the perpetual sighing of the Jews for the fleshpots of Egypt,—all these at last so harden the heart of the sinner, that it becomes insensible to exhortations and threats alike. Temporal blessings affect him no more than trials and adversity. He is as insensible to everything that happens to him as the stone pillar in the field that remains unaffected by wind, rain, or hail.

And what is there to be surprised at in that? The obdurate sinner is blinded once for all; he is incapable, so to speak, of discerning between good and evil, between what is reprehensible and what is praiseworthy: "They have not known nor understood, they walk on in darkness." The loss of eternal happiness, the bitterness of death, the pains of hell, the remembrance of which used formerly to send a shudder through him, he now utterly disregards. Since he has sunk into the depth of sin, he is no longer afraid of those things; nay, he laughs at them, and affects to disbelieve them. He looks on them as a dream, as mere talk of the priests, mere pointless arrows which cannot hurt; he is no more frightened at them than a blacksmith's dog is at the hammering to which he has long grown accustomed. Meanwhile, since he loses more and more every day the light and knowledge of divine things,

whilst his wickedness is daily on the increase, he at length goes so far that he does not wish to be better, and cannot be worse. Even if it were possible for him to do penance, he would be as far off from it as the demons themselves. Such is the punishment that an angry God inflicts on man for his obstinacy in wickedness. Could anything worse be imagined? No; it is impossible, for,

II. A punishment that is an unmixed evil, is certainly the greatest of all. Such a punishment is the blindness and obduracy of the habitual sinner. All other evils (call them what you will), are indeed the just punishments of sin; but if one only knows how to make the proper use of them, they are at the same time means of attaining eternal life more securely. Hence, they are rightly reckoned among the benefits and graces of God. They are evils which by their severity purify and cleanse our souls, make us enter into ourselves and see the vanity and deceitfulness of earthly things; they force us, as it were, to seek God; they are evils which serve to satisfy for our past sins, to help us to persevere in faith and good works, preserve us from fresh sin, and increase our merit and our glory in heaven; they are, in a word, evils that make us good and holy. The blindness of the soul, however, is a paramount evil. No profit or advantage can ever be reaped from it.

You have sinned, O man! You have even grievously and shamefully sinned. Nay, more, you have sinned continuously for years and years! But you feel remorse of conscience. You have neither pleasure by day nor repose by night. You continually hear a voice calling in your ear: "What hast thou done? Thou art an enemy of God, a slave of the devil, a child of damnation!" Certainly, as long as that lash is scourging you, you are suffering severely; but after all, be comforted and rejoice. All is not lost for you yet; the light of your soul is not yet altogether extinguished; God has not abandoned you; he is actually knocking at your door, and calling you back to his grace and friendship. Remorse of conscience, cruel as it is, can and

will, if you are so minded, bring you back to penance, to God, to heaven. This is the testimony that St. Augustine, who was first a sink of vice, and afterwards a vessel of election, gives of himself: "This very thing, my God," he says, "was for my good." It was this that saved me from the thraldom of the devil; namely, my conscience, which daily and hourly was fighting against thee and against myself. It was the bitter, but salutary scourge of conscience that forced me to return to thee. Learn then, that the gnawing worm of conscience is indeed a punishment; but it is a salutary one.

God may send the sinner other trials: sickness, misfortune, poverty, persecution, disgrace, the death of parents and dear friends. And yet, consolation can be found in all these trials and difficulties. Happy he who knows how to use them properly! Raising his mind to heaven, he can say: "Blessed be thou, my Lord and my God, who chastisest me with thy rod, as a loving father chastises his children! This sickness, poverty, misfortune, persecution, shame, abandonment, and loss which thou sendest me, is in thy merciful designs a school in which I can learn patience, an easy purgatory in which to atone for my sins, and a certain means of escaping hell and gaining heaven. I was before lazy and slothful in thy service, O my God; I have done little or nothing for thy honor and glory; now thou givest me an opportunity of doing something for thee, so that the punishment I suffer is a sanctifying one for me." Thus, in every evil and chastisement that is incurred by sin, there is something good and consoling which lessens the pain one has to suffer.

But in the blindness and obduracy of the soul there is no hope of amendment, no satisfaction, no merit. It is the one punishment God can inflict from which man can draw no profit. As the torments of the lost souls in hell can never satisfy God for their sins, but only hardens them the more, the more they suffer; so spiritual blindness daily increases the number of sins and vices, makes the heart more wicked, embitters more and more the divine anger, and adds every hour to the future pains of hell. Hence it is a certain

sign of eternal reprobation. When an angry God commanded the prophet Isaias to renounce the Jewish people: "Blind the heart of this people, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them;" he did not say: Humble the intolerable pride of that people; strike them dead; destroy them utterly. No, for all that seemed too light a punishment, nay, no punishment at all, when compared to spiritual blindness. "Blind the heart of this people;" as if to say, this is the only punishment with which I can most severely avenge the insults offered me. War, pestilence, famine, and all other plagues are not enough for those rebels; I will fill their souls with gloom and darkness, so that they may not understand or do any good. That is the terrible woe which the same angry God announces by the prophet Osee to obdurate sinners: "Woe to them when I shall depart from them."

That is the terrible woe from which the penitent David, with sighs and tears, begs to be delivered: "O Lord, rebuke me not in thy indignation, nor chastise me in thy wrath." The death of my beloved child, the rebellion of my own son, the decimation of my people by pestilence—all this, O Lord, I accept with resignation. Yes, O merciful God, I kiss the fatherly hand that chastises me; I am ready to suffer still more punishments of the same kind; but one thing I beg of thee, "Rebuke me not in thy indignation." Give me not over to my own desires, nor allow me to become blind and hardened in wickedness. Woe to the man whom God thus punishes in his anger!

O blind and obdurate sinners, listen to me now! Open your eyes, I beg of you! Give up sin, implore the grace of repentance. Be converted to God, and *at once!* Do not wait till to-morrow; for to-morrow, your case will be still more desperate! Alas! my words are in vain! These sinners have neither hearing, sight, nor understanding. They can indeed do penance and amend, for that is never impossible; but they will never do it, because they will never wish to do it. "Let them alone," said Christ to his disci-

ples of the hardened Pharisees, "they are blind." O merciful Lord, must we let them alone? And what will become of them? They will be lost forever. Must we, then, look on while they are rushing down to hell, and not stretch out a hand to save them? Yes, let them alone. Let them go to their destruction, because they are blind. Take no further trouble concerning them; any labor spent in trying to convert them is fruitless; they are blind. "Let them alone!" O fearful words! O words that are not words, but rather hail-storms and thunderbolts! Let hardened sinners alone! Is there, then, no more hope of their conversion? Are they rejected by God and condemned to hell? Then all I can do is to say to them, Alas! I pity you; I pity your miserable state, your precious souls; and, unless a miracle of grace is worked to restore you your spiritual eye-sight, I pity you on account of the unhappy eternity that awaits you!

Finally, I have a word to say to you. Not one of you, I hope, is in that miserable state of blindness; and this sermon aims only to be a salutary warning to deter you from ever falling into it. Ah, may God keep you and me from it! "Walk whilst you have the light." Now, whilst your eyes are open, walk carefully in the exact observance of the divine commands; work out your salvation in fear, humility, and child-like love of God; hate and avoid sin alone above all things, as far as you can. Above all, never form a habit of sinning, for that is the next step to obduracy. If you are already (which God forbid!) habitual sinners, trammelled by an inordinate love of any creature, oh, then, at once make a heroic resolution, and by speedy penance free yourselves from that state, "that the darkness overtake you not." Have you done penance already? Then keep to it, and see that you never commit another mortal sin. Perhaps the next sin you commit may be the one which will so excite the anger and indignation of God, that according to his inscrutable and at the same time most just decrees, he will withdraw his light from you, and leave you in blindness, a prey to your own desires. Say to yourselves every morning and evening: How many sins have I not committed

during my life? Is it not time for me to leave off sinning now?

Ah, detest your past sins and repent with your whole heart of having ever offended God. How many there are who, although their sins are less numerous than yours, are now in a state of blindness, or are actually in hell! I thank God that he has allowed your conscience to torment you, and has not withdrawn his light from you. Sin no more, that, after this life, you may come to the full enjoyment of felicity in a happy eternity. Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY.

THE STONE AT THE DOOR OF THE SEPULCHRE.

"Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre?"
Mark 16: 3.

The greater the desire of these holy women was to behold and anoint their dear Lord, the greater was their anxiety lest they should not be able to carry out their intention; for the entrance to the grave was closed by a huge stone; and therefore, they asked each other: Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre? Poor weak women (that they were), they had not the strength to do it;—nevertheless, they went on their way, determined to do their best.

In like manner, sinners are deterred from doing sincere penance, and being really reconciled to God. I say *sincere* penance, and *real* reconciliation; for the great mass of the ordinary annual confessions, enforced on bad Catholics at Easter, are mere shams and sacrileges. Most of such sinners are shut up in the grave of sin by a huge stone which they fear even to attempt to roll away. The inveterate habit of a certain vice, some unlawful intimacy, or proximate occasion of sin, which they do not wish to abandon; this is the stone that lies across the door of their hearts and which they think it impossible to remove. "Who" (they irresolutely

ask), "who shall roll us back the stone?" who will free me at last from this occasion, this intimacy, this inveterate habit? Sinners! (I reply) God helps those who help themselves. But he wishes you to learn now by my lips:

I. That the stone of a bad habit must be at once removed from the heart; and

II. That the longer the sinner delays, his difficulty becomes the greater, and, at length, utterly impossible.

I. When Lot tried to persuade his two sons-in-law to leave the doomed city, Sodom: "Arise," he said to them, "get you out of this place, because the Lord will destroy this city. And he seemed to them to speak as it were in jest" (Gen. 19 : 14). So hard did they find it to leave the city in which they had been born and brought up. Ah! far more readily would I undertake to move a huge mass of stone, than to roll away by preaching the stone of sinful habits from the hearts of sinners. So tyrannical a thing is habit, so hard and difficult is it to leave all at once, that which for a long time has occupied our hearts and affections! Is it an easy thing for the proud man to become all at once meek, modest, and humble? For the miser to deprive himself of his unlawful gains by making necessary restitution, by opening his heart and his hand to the poor? For the habitual profligate and libertine to resolve against giving way in the future to even a single wilful impure thought, to promise to abandon forever the object of his sinful love? For the blasphemer at once to abandon cursing and swearing? For the drunkard and the gambler to lead temperate, sober lives, and to spend their time in serving God with diligence? For one whose heart has hitherto been filled with hatred, enmity, and secret ill-will, to change all at once, and consent to be sincerely reconciled to his enemy, and to love him as himself?

What reason had the Jews to weep and sigh for the flesh-pots

of Egypt,since their enjoyment was earned only by hard labor under the merciless yoke of Pharao ? They sighed for the bread of slavary at the very time when God was leading them toward the promised land, and was feeding them miraculously with the heaven-sent manna ! Were they not very foolish thus to long for the coarse food of slavery ? The Jews longed for the garlic of Egypt,although they had the manna,on account of the influence of habit. Such a tyrannical thing is habit. The prophet Jeremias cries out as it were, in despair: "If the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, you also may do well, when you had learned evil." Alas ! who will roll us back the stone ? Who will remove that heavy weight from the hearts of sinners?

Shall I persuade you to lay aside your sinful habits, by incautiously representing to you at the very outset that you will have an almost insurmountable difficulty in doing so! Shall I imprudently make your hard and bitter task still harder, more bitter, yea, almost impossible ? Shall I thus deprive you of all courage for repentance, and harden you still more in sin, by driving you to despair? No, O sinners! The very difficulty of repentance (a difficulty which your own experience makes patent to you) must serve me as my sole weapon for conquering your understanding, and convincing you that you must at once, without delay, use every effort, and spare neither labor nor trouble, to roll away this stone, that is, to amend and abandon your sinful habits. Tell me, do you intend to go to heaven or not? If the latter is the case, I have done with you. But you say: "God forbid! we certainly hope and desire to gain heaven, and to be eternally happy!" Very good! But answer me this question: Do you think you can save your souls, with that heavy stone on your heart, shutting you up in the grave of your bad habits, sealing you fast in the state of sin ? No, you say; we believe that no one who is in the state of mortal sin can go to heaven; he must first be converted, do penance, and amend his life. Do you think, then, that you will one day repent and amend ? Certainly;

some day or other we will return what we have unjustly acquired, leave the proximate occasion of sin, make peace with our enemies, and give up vice. Very well.

Tell me, when do you intend to carry this resolution of yours into effect? Not yet, you say; it is too difficult now. When, then? Some other time, in a year, or a few months perhaps. And do you believe that it will be easier for you to abandon your sinful habit and do penance in a few years or a few months, than it is now? This is the fearful trap by which the crafty tempter ensnares most sinners to eternal destruction. Well knowing that repentance is necessary for salvation, they fondly imagine that it will be easier for them to repent at some future time. But you may be quite certain that it will be far more difficult for you later on, than it is now. In the first place, this is clear enough when we consider the question as concerning the Almighty God. It is an article of faith, O sinner, that you cannot free yourself from sin by your own natural strength alone,that you can never hope to do so, unless impelled thereto by the grace of God. True, the good God never refuses to a contrite sinner in this life,the grace of conversion and repentance. But the grace that is called efficacious, that is,the grace that God foresees man will really co-operate with, he is not bound to give to any one, and he bestows it as a special act of goodness and beneficence on whomsoever,and at whatsoever time he pleases. Again, the more wicked a sinner is, the longer he continues in sin, and the deeper evil habits have become rooted in his heart, so also the greater and more powerful, and, so to speak, even miraculous, must be the grace which will enable him to be truly converted. Our divine Lord, as St. Augustine remarks regarding the three people whom he raised from the dead, merely said to the lifeless daughter of Jairus: "Damsel, arise." While, as to the young man of Naim, who was being carried to the grave: "He came near and touched the bier." He made use of more seeming effort when he commanded him: "Young man, I say to thee, arise." But what labor it cost him to raise Lazarus, whose body had already begun to decay in the grave! "He

groaned in the spirit and troubled himself." And Jesus wept. "Jesus, therefore, again groaning in himself, cometh to the sepulchre." And when he had caused the stone to be taken away from the sepulchre, "Jesus, lifting up his eyes, said: Father, I give thee thanks that thou hast heard me." Finally, "He cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth." What was the reason of the difference? Did it cost Omnipotence more labor to raise one than the other from the dead? That cannot be. To will and to accomplish are one and the same thing with God. Christ wished to show by this difference in the three miracles, that it is far more difficult, that it requires a much more powerful grace, to convert one who has been buried a long time in the grave of evil habits, than one who has been only an occasional sinner.

Perhaps you imagine that this special, powerful, and extraordinary grace, that God is bound to give to no one, will be given to you, when in some years' time you wish to amend your evil ways? Have you ever heard of a grace of that kind being promised to any one, much less to yourself? But you say: Perhaps it will be given to *me*. And perhaps, indeed, in all probability, it will *not*. For, to look at the matter reasonably, do you think that your continuing to offend him is a likely way to induce the Almighty to bestow on you a special mark of his favor? Is it not as if you were saying to his very face: "O God, I do not want thy grace now. Some other time, it will be more convenient for me to accept it; thou canst help me in a few years, after I have caused thee still more displeasure; then thou canst give me grace, and a still more powerful grace!" Alas, poor wretch, that darest so presumptuously to dictate to the Almighty God, and to prescribe a mode of action to his goodness? Do you think that God will wait upon you, as if he were your servant, and that he will do whatever you tell him?

God may permit you to go on thus for awhile, he may bear with you most patiently for a time, but instead of giving you at last a special grace, he will deliver you up to your evil inclinations, and will allow you to become more and more entangled in the meshes of your sinful habits. Sin away then, if you are bent on doing so,

but remember that the time will come when the sinner will wish to repent, and will not be able, because, when he might have repented, he refused to do so. It is one thing for that sinner to find mercy from God who falls through mere frailty, even a hundred times, and remains in the state of sin for a certain length of time, but far different is it for him who makes a habit of sinning, and wilfully and obstinately perseveres in sin. The same God who forgave the Ninivites, because they at once did penance for their sins in sackcloth and ashes, destroyed the whole world by a deluge, because in those days men did not hearken to oft repeated exhortations to repent, and refused to abandon their sinful habits. If you find it hard to repent now, what will it be when the habit of sin has become inveterate? Therefore throw that heavy stone at once off your heart. "To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts!" (Ps. 94 : 8.) Do it at once, to-day; do not wait even till to-morrow. The devil whose slave you are, will increase the difficulty in conquering your bad habits.

II. Every sinner must know by experience, even if Holy Scripture said nothing about it, that he is a slave and servant of the devil. But perhaps you think that it is only a figurative slavery? If so, consider for a moment what you are and how you live. What strange, contradictory, and bewildering thoughts in your mind! What uneasiness and anxiety in your conscience! What startling changes and contradictions in your will! Do you not see that you are the slave of a remorseless tyrant, whom you must obey in all things, being compelled, so to speak, to dance to his piping? You experience an inward impulse to do some good work, for instance, to go to church, to hear a sermon, to remain away from that dangerous company, to say your prayers, to go to confession and Communion, etc. In spite of that inspiration, the devil, either by himself, or by his instruments, compels you, as it were, to go somewhere else, where you will commit a number of sins. You are thus not your own master, but the servant and slave of the devil. He can do with you what he pleases; if he tells you to curse and swear,

to slander your neighbor, to seek revenge, to sin against holy purity, you obey at once, although you know that you are doing wrong, and are acting against God and your conscience, to your own great detriment. So completely are you a slave to the devil.

Tell me, how will you repent and amend your wicked ways when you have spent your youth in sinful pleasures, and have fully satisfied all your inordinate appetites? If the devil has such power over your will, after you have lived for a few months or years in sin, what power will he not have after you have spent many months and years in his service, adding daily sin to sin? If you cannot free yourself now from the ten or twelve cords with which he has bound you, how will you be able to escape when you are fettered in iron chains from head to foot? We read in the Gospel of St. Mark, that when the father of the young demoniac complained to Jesus that his disciples had failed to cast out the evil spirit, our Lord asked at once: "How long a time is it since this hath happened unto him?" And the father answered: "From his infancy." Why did Christ ask this question? Nothing to him is unknown. There is no doubt that he knew more about the matter than the young man's father did. He asked the question, that we may understand why the disciples could not drive out the devil. For it is as if Christ said: Since he has been possessed since childhood, it is no wonder that the evil spirit does not wish to leave him. O sinner, if it is now difficult for a confessor or a preacher to drive out of your heart the demon who has taken possession of it by habitual sin, who will be able to expel that evil spirit after he has possessed you for several years longer? God alone can do it, and that too, by a miracle of grace. But I am afraid there is little chance of his helping you, if you continue to despise him as you now do.

Pitiable was the lot of the Israelites before they were freed from the slavery of Egypt, for they were forced to labor hard, "and they built for Pharao cities of tabernacles." O unhappy people, do you not know what you are doing? Can you not guess that you are building your own prison? If you desire liberty, why do you labor to defeat your desire? Every brick you lay renders your

escape more difficult. Do you understand the figure, O sinners ? Alas, much more pitiable is your sad state ! The devil urges sinners to add sin to sin, that they may surround themselves with a wall, which will imprison them perpetually. How the devil must laugh at your labor and at your intention of doing penance after you have committed still more sin ! You are like a bird ensnared in the nets of the fowler, that entangles itself still more by its futile efforts to get free, to the great amusement of its captor.

But supposing even that the devil were to leave you in peace, and place no obstacle in the way of your conversion, and that God were to bestow on you a powerful grace ; even then, there would be a greater difficulty on the part of your own will to co-operate with grace, a more determined opposition to the call to repentance. The grace of God is not enough for a sincere conversion. You, O sinner, must co-operate with it. You must efficaciously and sovereingly hate all sin; you must firmly purpose never to consent, even in mere desire, to a mortal sin; firmly purpose to avoid carefully all dangerous occasions of sin. Without these dispositions, your repentance is worth nothing. What think you now? Will not your conversion be far more difficult, when long delay has fed and inflamed to the highest degree your inordinate love of sinful pleasures ? when an aversion for good works has taken deeper root in your heart?

In Holy Scripture sin is compared to a weight or burden, to a bandage, to a cord, to an illness, and to a skin. It is a *weight* oppressing the overburdened soul, so that it cannot raise itself to heavenly and supernatural things. A child groans under a burden it can scarcely lift. If you increase the load by twenty, thirty, or a hundred pounds, will it become easier to carry ? Every sin is a *bandage*, blindfolding the eyes of the understanding, so that it can hardly discern good from evil. Tie on several bandages, you will not be able to see at all. Sin is a *cord* that draws the will away from good and binds it fast to evil; double that cord, and you make your will a complete prisoner. St. Augustine testifies to this in relating the history of his conversion : "I was sighing

in bondage, being kept therein not by another, but by my own iron will." Sin is a *malady* of the soul. A fresh wound can be easily cured ; but when it gets old, no medicine can do it any good. The habit of sin is like a *skin*. There are some who put on the habit of sinning, not like a garment that may be taken off, but like their own skin, which can hardly be removed. A young and tender skin is so sensitive that it cannot bear the prick of a needle, but the skin that has become hardened and callous by work can bear even burning coals. Hence, the sinner calmly reposes in his wickedness, he is quite satisfied with his condition, and has no desire to change it; nay, sin becomes to him a second nature, a necessity, for when a habit is not resisted, it becomes a necessity.

Consider this matter,O sinner,in a reasonable light. You cannot extinguish your desire now, although it is as yet but a spark: how will you be able to conquer it when it has become a great fire? You have a difficulty now in breaking a thread; how will you hereafter tear asunder a strong cable ? The nail, as yet, has been struck by the hammer only two or three times, and you cannot pull it out without trouble ; how will you be able to extract it when it has been driven into the head by repeated blows? Your wound is still fresh, but it is hard to heal ; how will you heal it when it has become putrid and cancerous? In a word, if it is so difficult for you now to overcome your bad habits and do penance, what will it be hereafter, when the skin shall have grown hard and callous?

Listen to the terrible threat Christ himself launches forth against you ! "You shall seek me, and shall not find me" (John 7 : 34); you shall die in your sins (John 8 : 21) ; a threat that is to be understood particularly of the habit of sin. Our habitual sins are truly *our* sins; they are ours as to their malice, which comes from our perverse wills ; ours as to the guilt and punishment they deserve, which guilt remains in us until we do penance. The sins, however, which we commit now and then through frailty, or when overcome by a violent temptation, are, properly speaking, not our

sins as far as our inclinations and desires are concerned : for we repent of them easily, and soon throw them off our conscience. In *your* sins then, O unhappy wretches, in your bad habits, which you refuse to amend, you will die, and go down to eternal death.

Therefore I repeat, if you are in earnest about amending your lives, if you are in earnest about going to heaven, delay no longer ! Do not wait till your salvation becomes almost impossible ! Like St. Augustine, make an earnest resolution to repent at once. He found it just as hard as you do to roll away the heavy stone from his heart, and he was always deferring his conversion from day to day. At last, he said to himself : "How long shall I keep on saying to-morrow, to-morrow ? Why not at once ? Why should not this hour be the last of my disgrace ?" Do you also say : This hour I will give up sin, do penance for all my past sins, and with the grace of God, I will sin no more and rise with Christ to a new life. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ON THE EVILS INDICATED BY A RELAPSE INTO SIN.

"*The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord.*"
John 20: 20.

Again there is joy and exultation among the disciples of Christ! They have seen the Lord, and they know that he is really risen from the dead. Again, too, there is joy and exultation in the Church of God at this season. The faithful children of the Church have arisen from the death of sin by their Easter confession. God grant that such may be really the case with you all. Let us be glad, and rejoice in the Lord. But there is one thing that troubles me; namely, that this joyful feast will be spoiled, in a short time, by the relapse of some penitents into their former evil

ways. How wicked and ungrateful of them to thus treat their good God, and what imminent danger in which to place their precious souls! To-day, therefore, I shall try to make clear to such souls that a speedy and easy relapse into sin is

I. A certain sign that they are not truly risen by their Easter confession.

II. An almost infallible sign, that they did not truly repent when making their Easter confession.

I. In order to be genuine, our mortal resurrection, from the death of sin to the life of grace, must be conformable in all respects to the resurrection of Christ. "For we are buried with him by baptism into death" (as St. Paul writes to the Romans), "that, as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For, if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6 : 4, 5). Here we might ask, why does the Apostle put before us the resurrection of Christ as an example of the conversion of the sinner? Did not Lazarus rise from the dead? And could he not have said that we must begin a new life, just as Lazarus did after his resurrection? There is a great difference between the two cases. It is true that Lazarus rose from the dead; but it is also true that he died again. Such was not the case with our Lord and Saviour. "Knowing," continues the Apostle, "that Christ rising again from the dead, dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over him." Having once left the grave, he returns to it no more. "For in that he died to sin, he died once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God" (Rom. 6: 9, 10).

In the same way, the truly penitent Christian should rise from the grave of sin, not like Lazarus, who died again, but like Jesus Christ who liveth forever. He must persevere in the life of sanctifying grace, and never more wilfully return to the grave of his

former sins. And that is what the Apostle says: "That the body of sin may be destroyed to the end that we may serve sin no longer" (Rom.6: 6). And he even asks how it is possible that we should again be the servants of sin: "For we that are dead to sin, how shall we live any longer therein?" (Ibid. 2.) How then can we believe that he who is really risen from the death of sin to the life of grace, can so easily return to his former wicked ways? Can he a few days after his Easter confession, bury himself in the same old grave by relapse into his habitual mortal sins? No; it cannot be. He who easily relapses into sin gives clear proof that he did not rise with Christ.

Again, in answer to the question: How do we know that the risen Lazarus was to die again, but not the risen Christ? Christ left his grave-clothes in the sepulchre; but Lazarus did not. In the old slave-days when a galley came to port, all the galley-slaves and passengers landed at once; the former, to purchase provisions; the latter, to stay on shore. Any one accustomed to the discipline of a slaver could say at once who have left the ship for good, and who intend returning to her; for the former were quite free, while the latter were chained, as a sign of their bondage. Sinner, you, who have confessed your sins and received holy Communion this Easter! tell me, in what manner have you risen from the death of sin? Like Christ, leaving behind you all the tokens of sin; or like Lazarus, still bound with the grave-clothes? Have you left the grave, as you would a ship, with all the marks of freedom about you; or do you still wear the chains on your limbs, as a sign of slavery? Are you unable to answer that question? And yet, you must know most about it; for, if you soon resume the cerements of the grave, if you again return to the galleys, to the slavery of the devil, you can look on it as a sure sign that you have only risen in outward appearance from the dead, that you are still, like Lazarus, actually bound hand and foot with the winding-bands of corruption.

Finally, the Gospel says, that our Lord always "stood" when he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection: "Jesus stood in

the midst of them" (Luke 24 : 36), in order to show that the true penitent must stand erect in the state of grace. According to an old custom in the Catholic Church, the *Regina Cæli* is recited thrice a day during Easter time, not kneeling, but *standing*. The holy martyr, St. Justin, who lived in the first ages of Christianity, asks the question : "Whence arises that custom in the Church ?" Would it not be more becoming to pray to God and to his holy Mother on bended knees, than standing. No, he answers, by kneeling, we signify that we have fallen to earth by our sins, and therefore, during Paschal time, we *stand*, in order to show that by the resurrection of Christ and by penance we have risen from our unhappy fall, and must now walk erect in our good resolutions. Such, too, is the meaning of the words of the Apostle to the Galatians : "Stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5 : 1). And to the Philippians : "Therefore, my dearly-beloved brethren, and most desired, my joy, and my crown : so stand fast in the Lord. And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4 : 1, 7), who stood amongst his disciples, and said to them : "Peace be to you."

On the other hand, it is a sure sign of wickedness not to progress in the straight path of virtue. The prophet David says : "The wicked walk round about" (Ps. 11 : 9). He who walks round and round soon gets giddy and falls ; or else he comes back to the place he started from. Inconstant Christian, who so easily relapse, running as it were, in a circle from sin to confession, and confession to sin ! learn from this that you are not of the number of the truly penitent, but rather of the wicked. You have not really risen with Christ from the death of the soul.

II. With all your confessions, you have not yet done true penance. True repentance calls first and foremost for a real, supernatural sorrow and detestation of sin ; and secondly, for a firm purpose of amendment. I am not now speaking of relapse into, or human imperfections, of venial sin. Nor is it my intention to assert that true

contrition is lacking to all those penitents who, after a considerable interval of time, again fall now and then into their former grievous sins. Neither do I wish to say, that it is always and in every case, an infallible sign of a bad confession when one at once relapses into sin ; for it may be that one who has truly repented is immediately beset by the devil with an extraordinarily dangerous occasion, and through weakness and inconstancy, permits himself to be led into sin again. I am speaking only of those sinners who constantly and easily fall back into their past sins, after confession, and whose lives are an almost continual relapse ; who, when the great feasts of the year come round, keep from sin for a few days, and go to the Sacraments, but quickly relapse into their evil habits of cursing, swearing, drinking, injustice, and impurity. Of these I say, that, generally speaking, it is hardly probable that they have had at confession true sorrow and resolution of amendment,—hardly probable that they have received the grace of God, along with the forgiveness of their sins, and the other helps of the Sacrament. I will prove this in detail.

1. The sorrow required for true repentance must be in its intensity and efficacy necessarily "above everything ;" that is that it must surpass all merely natural sorrow. To make this clearer, imagine the case of a young widow, who has but one, beautiful, dearly-loved son. This child is killed by some one. Who can explain the grief of the mother's heart at the cruel murder ? The mere sight of the dagger that did the deed is enough to make her faint away. She cannot bear the sight of her son's blood-stained clothes, or of anything that can remind her of her misfortune. Her heart is ready to break with sorrow ; she cannot pass by the place in which the crime was committed. The murderer's wife, his children, his servants, his friends, although they are quite innocent, are objects of such hatred to her, that she cannot bear to have anything to do with them. If she passes by his house, her blood runs cold ; if she hears his name mentioned, she is ready to lose her senses with horror and grief. Perhaps that sorrow and

grief is "above everything"? No, answer theologians; it is but a sensible and natural sorrow. The sorrow for sin which is required for penance must be much greater and more powerful. A rich merchant has sent all his goods to an agent in a foreign country. At an appointed time, he sets out to receive his money; but he finds out that his debtors have all gone away and left the place without paying him. Thus, the unfortunate man is reduced to beggary; he has neither goods, nor money, nor bread, nor counsel, nor hope. He tears his hair through sorrow and desperation. Neither in heaven nor on earth can he find any consolation. Perhaps this grief and sorrow, which torments him day and night, is above all? Oh, no, like the other, it is a mere natural and sensible sorrow.

Your sorrow, O sinner, whenever you come to the sacred tribunal of penance laden with mortal sin, must be in its intensity and efficacy, and in its appreciative power, far greater than that of the merchant and the mother. Otherwise, it is of no avail for the forgiveness of sin. Mark well the words, "in its appreciative power;" for it is natural that the murder of her child should cause the mother to feel a keener sensible sorrow, and that the unexpected loss of his goods should affect the merchant in the same way. This natural sensitiveness is not required for the supernatural sorrow of a repentant sinner; and yet, I say, that the latter must in its appreciative power and in its efficacy be greater than the former. That is, I must look on the loss of heaven as greater than the loss of all temporal goods in the whole world. I must regret the death of my soul more than that of the dearest friends I have on earth. Further, I must abhor offending God more than the worst accident that can happen to me in any way, more than any pain or trouble that can afflict me. My sorrow must be of such a kind that, if I were in the place of the mother or the merchant, and had it in my power to prevent the murder or the loss by a mortal sin, by virtue of my sorrow, I must prefer that the sin should not be committed, rather than the murder or the loss should be avoided. In short, I must be willing to suffer any

trouble, pain, and grief, rather than offend God by mortal sin.

Now, I ask you, is it likely that a man who has this sincere sorrow for his sins should at once, at the first attack, and without offering any opposition, relapse into the same sins that he has just repented of and detested? If the widow, whose grief at the death of her only son was so excessive, should consent to marry his murderer after four, five, or six days, what would all sensible men think of her? They would say that she had either lost her reason, or that her sorrow was merely apparent and not real. Now, since the sorrow for sin must be much greater than the grief of that mother, nay, than all the natural sorrow of all men, tell me, O sinner, you who so easily fall back into your former sins after confession, and constantly alternate between sin and confession, confession and sin, can you persuade any reasonable man that you detested and hated your sins in the Sacrament of Penance, with that powerful contrition which I have just described? Not even, if you have common sense, could you persuade yourself of such a thing, for your own conscience would contradict you. The very house, the amusement, the person, the drink, the company that led you into sin, would inspire you with horror and aversion, if your repentance were sincere. But if, after confession, instead of abhorring and avoiding them, you go back at once to that house, that company, that person, and commit the same sins over again, I do not believe in your protests of sorrow and repentance. They have not the qualities that stamp them as genuine. Still less had you a firm purpose of amendment.

2. The purpose required for true repentance must be a heartfelt, earnest one, far stronger than all other human resolutions. It must consist of a firm and general determination of the will not, under any circumstances, or for any reason whatever, to offend God by mortal sin. This purpose must further be unconditional. You must be prepared to resist sin, even if all the joys and pleasures, all the riches and treasures of the world were enticing you to commit it; yea, if all men were goading you to sin by threats of

the most terrible tortures. And this resolution must be general, that is, it must be for all future time, even if you had a thousand years of life still before you. It must be extended to all places and all circumstances, whether you can foresee them or not. It must be a firm purpose to avoid all occasions and dangers which (as far as you can foresee), are likely to lead you into mortal sin. It must be prepared to use every means in your power in order not to sin grievously again. If you have not this earnest resolution, your purpose, and therefore your repentance, have not the qualities they should have, and it would be better for you not to go to confession under the circumstances. Is it likely, nay, is it possible, that a man who has such a purpose will again abandon his God by sin at the first opportunity, at the least temptation, for the sake of gratifying some brutal passion, or for some worthless thing? Judge yourselves of the matter.

Sinner, when you made a firm resolution in confession, and solemnly protested, before God and his minister that you would never again commit a mortal sin, the priest, who did not rightly know you and your conscience, believed you at first, and looking on you as a true penitent, pronounced the words of absolution over you with much secret joy of heart, for he imagined that he had done a great work in bringing back a stray sheep to the fold. But, after the lapse of a few days, you broke your promise by committing the same grievous sins over again. You went again to confession, repeated the same promises, and after a short time, again perjured yourself. For the third, fourth, tenth time you said in confession, that you would never sin mortally again! "I am sorry," you exclaimed, "with my whole heart, that I have offended God; henceforth I will show that I am a true servant of his; I would rather die a thousand times than offend him again!" But you never kept your word. And this change from sin to confession, and from confession to sin, has been going on now perhaps for some years. Is that the way you mock the almighty God? Do you think you can persuade him that you have had a real, earnest purpose of amendment? No; no reasonable man could believe

that, much less the all-seeing God. Arguing from the lamentable ease with which you relapsed into sin, it is evident that all your confessions were invalid, because you had not a true and firm purpose of amendment, and therefore, which is the third and last proof of your false repentance, that you never obtained the forgiveness of your sins, nor the helps and graces of the Sacrament from God.

3. The effects of the Sacrament of Penance in souls that are properly disposed, according to the teaching of theologians, are these: Besides sanctifying grace, which makes us friends and children of God, he bestows on our souls those copious helps and actual graces which make them terrible to the demon, so that he can no longer so easily attack and overcome them, and he also arms and strengthens us against our own evil inclinations and temptations, so that we may easily overcome them. Hence, the best advice to be given one who has fallen into mortal sin through natural weakness and frailty is, not to defer repentance and confession for a long time, but at once to be sorry for his sin and confess it. For, while a man is at enmity with God, he is like a fortress in possession of the devil, who takes care to garrison it with as many of his soldiers as possible. One mortal sin cannot long remain alone in the conscience, but it continually begets more and more grievous sins; a soul in the state of grace even in the midst of the most violent temptations, can keep itself from sin far easier, that one in the state of sin can avoid committing a new sin, although the latter may be free from all assaults of temptation. This is because of the great weakness and frailty which come from the loss of grace, and of the favor of God.

Therefore, those penitents who keep from mortal sin for a long time after their conversion, have in that very fact, an excellent proof that they are in the state of grace. For if they were not, it would be most unlikely, humanly speaking, that they could so long refrain from committing new sins.

But you, who so easily relapse into your former sins after con-

fession, and who continually alternate between confession and sin, you, I fear, have never really repented of your sins with a supernatural sorrow. You have neither the courage nor the power to overcome your evil inclinations, nor to resist temptation; therefore, it is probable you have not received the grace of God in the Sacrament of Penance. You add sin to sin, consequently, your former sins are, presumably, still upon your conscience ; and your repentance not a true, but rather, a false one. Hence, if you have been a relapsing sinner for years past, and are now in thorough earnest about your salvation, you have good reason to make a general confession of all your sins, mentioning also the number of times you have been to confession and holy Communion meanwhile, and preparing yourself more carefully than in the past by exciting yourself to true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment.

God grant, however, that in this Easter confession you have truly repented of all your sins, and that you are now in the state of sanctifying grace and in the friendship of God. Oh, what a great and priceless blessing it is for you that the long-suffering and merciful God has borne with you for so many years, and has, at last, admitted you to his favor! But now, I beg of you, above all, be steadfast for the future, and see that you do not, by relapsing into sin, turn the patient mercy of God into implacable hatred, and lose all hope of future forgiveness. This vigilance and fidelity on your part will be the surest sign that you have risen with Christ from the grave of sin, and regained the freedom of the children of God. You will be able to rejoice as the disciples did when they saw the Lord, cherishing in your hearts the comfortable assurance that you will see him hereafter in heaven, and there rejoice with him forever. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE ADVANTAGES OF PERSEVERANCE.

"*He seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and flieth.*"
John 10: 12.

It is cowardice for a shepherd to run away at the moment when his presence is most required for the safety of his flock; and it is wrong for a sheep to leave the flock at the approach of the wolf,and to run into the jaws of the ravening wolf. Foolish and stray sheep of this kind are those penitents who, after having laid aside the burden of their sins in the Sacrament of Penance, run away from God again, and at the first temptation, go back to their sins. To relapse quickly, and through habit,into one's former sins is generally a sign that one did not really rise with Christ from the death of sin to the life of grace, and did not do true penance. To encourage penitents still further in their good resolutions, I now say:

I. That perseverance in good, after penance, is the surest sign and means of rising with Christ to eternal glory; and hence

II. He who earnestly desires to go to heaven, must never return to his former sins.

I. That which causes the greatest trouble and anguish to souls really desirous of salvation is the inscrutable secret of eternal predestination to glory, and the constant uncertainty as to whether they are worthy of God's love or hatred. Such souls will say to you: I firmly believe that on the great day of the general judgment we shall all rise again from the dead; but shall I then stand on the right hand of the Judge, with the sheep of Christ,or on the left amongst the accursed goats of the devil? Shall I rise with the former to eternal glory, or with the latter to eternal damnation?

Completely hidden from us all during this life, as is this decree of God, this it is that often forces people to sigh: Ah! if I only knew what will become of me during eternity! If I were only certain of being amongst the elect! How utterly wretched they would be, if they knew beforehand that they would be lost forever! How wisely and advantageously he acts in keeping from the just and pious the certainty of their salvation! Otherwise, where would be their Christian humility, child-like fear, watchfulness and modesty, and horror of sin? No, this knowledge of the surety of eternity would not be good for any one. "Wherefore, brethren," says St. Peter, "labor the more, that by good works you may make sure your vocation and election" (2 Pet. 1 : 10). Still, there are different signs from which we may reasonably conclude, nay, from which we may derive a human certainty and assurance that we shall rise to eternal glory. But all those signs of predestination, whatever their name may be, are so called, because they help man in a special manner to persevere in good and to be constant and zealous in the divine service. From this, I conclude that perseverance and constancy in good is, of itself, the surest sign of a future resurrection to everlasting glory.

1. Perseverance places a man, even during this life, in almost the same state as that in which the glorified bodies of the blessed will be in heaven. For, in what does the exceeding great happiness of the latter consist? Mainly, that they are immortal, incapable of suffering or corruption, and not subject to any change. The life, glory, and happiness of the Saints will last as long as God is God. As they are to-day, so they will be for all eternity, as St. Paul writes of the glorious body of Jesus Christ after the resurrection, which the bodies of the just and elect will resemble on the last day. There you have a true picture of not only a just man who never offended God by a mortal sin, but also of a converted sinner, who, after having done penance, remains constant in his good resolutions, and has still the same earnest will to observe eternal fidelity to his God. Human respect, vain customs and deceit-

ful maxims of the world, points of honor, wealth, station, and carnal pleasures, you are the lords and masters of the children of men, who, according to your good will and pleasure, waver a thousand times a day, like a fragile reed, blown hither and thither by the wind. You can move your subjects by turns to anger or joy—love or hatred. To-day, you fill them with exultation, to-morrow with despair; and you continually drive them on to all sorts of vice. But with the servant of God you can do nothing! Once, for all, firmly resolved, at all cost, to keep the faith he has pledged to his beloved God and Master, he never departs from him by a deliberate sin. This is his firm determination; and what he is to-day, in that respect, he was yesterday, and will be to-morrow. "Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8 : 35), he can say with St. Paul; neither joy nor sorrow, riches or poverty, honor or disgrace, life or death! No earthly creature shall induce me to do anything against God or his holy commandments. Let the most horrible and formidable temptations come upon me. They will never find the least place in my heart! My chief refuge and help against their attacks will be that almighty God who is everywhere present, and whom I am resolved to serve till the end of my life. I am ready to die a thousand times, rather than consent to a single mortal sin; and I am assured that my God will not forsake me, provided I only remain faithful to him and his service, as I am now determined to do. Oh, truly happy state which, here on earth, so closely resembles the immutable state of the glorified bodies of the blessed!

But you, changeable Christians, you who, like the moon, are ever changing, ever moving round in the same circle, by constantly alternating between confession and sin, what have you to expect? I will tell you honestly, though I pity and compassionate your poor souls. You have reason to fear, nay, it is probable, that you are not amongst the number of those who, on the last day, will rise with Christ to glory; and, therefore, that you will have no share in his kingdom. Not I, but St. Jude, thus assigns to you your place in eternity in these words: "Wandering stars, to whom the storm of

darkness is reserved forever" (St. Jude 13). "No man putting his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9 : 62).

2. How can an inconstant, dissolute, unfaithful man be fit for the kingdom of God, since he is of no value even for this world? No private individual will keep a servant in his house, unless he can rely on his fidelity. Would you entrust with important business, a man of an inconstant disposition, who is one way to-day, and another to-morrow, so that you can never be sure of him? No, a man of that kind is looked on as a good-for-nothing even by the world. How, then, could the God of infinite majesty tolerate in his kingdom a wavering, unreliable servant who is full of promises that he never fulfils; who serves God to-day, and the devil to-morrow? No one looking back, or returning to his old ways, is fit for the heavenly kingdom. Remember Lot's wife. The angel who rescued her and her family from the consuming fires of Sodom, forbade them to look back on the doomed city; but the woman's curiosity was excited by the noise of the busy rain and the cries of the perishing people. She turned round only for a moment; but in that moment, she was punished by almighty God by being turned into a pillar of salt. A monument to all time, to warn men not to look back. That, once saved from the Sodom of sin by the angel of penance, they must never more even wilfully desire the occasion of their former sins. In short, that perseverance in good is the surest means of rising gloriously and gaining eternal life.

Not he who begins well, nor he who continues well, but he who ends well, will be crowned. Therefore, we cannot promise heaven with certainty to any one, no matter how holy he is, as long as he is on this earth. Why did God, in the beginning of creation, praise all he had made, and call it good, man alone excepted? Having created the light: "And God saw the light, that it was good" (Gen. 1 : 4). Having created the firmament, and divided the waters: "And God saw that it was good," and so on after the creation of

the dry land and the animals, "God saw that it was good." Finally the Blessed Trinity, holding, as it were, a council, resolved to create man: "Let us make man to our own image and likeness; and God created man to his own image" (Ibid. 26,27). Now, having said of all the creatures that they were good,—did God praise man as the best of them? No: he says not a word, not a syllable of approbation. Why so? His praise is not to be given beforehand, but afterwards. It belongs not to the beginning, but to the end. Adam was created holy, and a child of God. By sanctifying grace, he had a right to Paradise, and was worthy of the favor of God. But it was not yet time to call him good. In fact, in a very short time, he became a very wicked sinner. Yet he was not immediately condemned to hell for his sin. He did penance, persevered in the state of grace till death, and is now reigning in the glory of heaven with God. His praise does not belong to the beginning, but to the end. Sinner, no matter how wicked you have been hitherto, do not despair of salvation. Only do real penance; amend your sinful life, and your praise will be at the end. Just, innocent, and now beloved children of God! be not elated because of your piety and virtues! Keep yourselves continually in humility and child-like fear of God; for even you, as long as you are in this valley of tears, this dangerous exile, may fall and come to an unhappy end. Your praise and salvation do not belong to the beginning, but to the end. Paul made a bad beginning, but a good end; Judas began well, but ended badly; therefore Judas was condemned to hell, while Paul was elected to eternal glory. Man's resurrection to eternal life depends on the grace of final perseverance.

But, then you exclaim! Even if I continue faithful in the service of God, I cannot be sure of the grace of perseverance, on which my salvation depends? That is quite true. A Roman lady once went to St. Gregory, in a great state of anxiety, and said: "Holy Father, help me in my trouble! How will I fare at the end?" "Ah," answered Gregory, "you ask a difficult and a useless question. Difficult, because I know as little about it as you do;

useless, because such knowledge as you demand would do neither you nor me any good. Still, if you wish me to tell you with certainty what fate is in store for me and you, know that, if we both remain constant in good till the end, we shall surely receive the grace of final perseverance, and die happily." The same answer I make to your objection, Christian souls. My salvation and yours depends on the last grace of final perseverance ; there is no doubt about that. But whether we shall receive that grace or not, depends on ourselves principally,—namely, on how we spend the time of our lives. Therefore we should endeavor with all diligence to continue in the right path, and not relapse into sin ; for this constancy is the true and most certain means of obtaining from God the last grace of final perseverance. "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved" (Matt. 10: 22). These words are not to be understood of the grace of final perseverance; otherwise, their meaning would simply be: He to whom I shall give that final grace shall be saved. No, our Lord's object was to exhort us all to labor for our salvation, and therefore, he urges us to do a thing that is fully in our power if we wish to do it. Hence, to him who diligently avoids evil and perseveres constantly in good until death, to him, says our Lord, I will give the grace of eternal salvation.

But (you urge again), since no one can merit this grace, even by any amount of previous constancy in good works, the uncertainty of salvation is just as great for the good as for the bad. True again. We can, however, merit this grace by a merit founded on the generosity and mercy of God. God never allows himself to be outdone by his creatures in generosity. When he sees a man of good will striving to keep his law, to overcome and mortify his own evil inclinations, to avoid as far as possible all sin and all occasions and dangers of sin, even although he, now and then, commits a fault through frailty and weakness, almighty God is, as it were, forced by his infinite goodness and mercy to give to such a man the grace of final perseverance ; and it hardly ever happens that such a man dies an unhappy death.

Such was the assured hope of the elder Tobias, when, filled with

consolation, he said to his friends : "We look for that life which God will give to them that never change their faith from him" (Tob. 2 : 18). And the same assurance was a source of joy to St. Paul, when he said, "There is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me in that day" (2 Tim. 4 : 8). On what was his assurance grounded ? "I am certain of it," he answers, "because I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4 : 7). I persevered after my conversion, and therefore it now remains for me to receive the crown of justice, which the just God will give me.

We, too, as experience teaches, give evidence of a similar assurance in our judgments. If we see or hear of a man dying a particularly peaceful, holy, and pious death, our thoughts revert at once to the life he led. Finding that he lived as a good, pious, and zealous Christian, and was steadfast in keeping the commandments for many years, oh then, we exclaim without the least hesitation: "What wonder is it, that he should die such a happy death ! As a man lives, so will he die. As life is, so will death be !" And, hence, if we hear of one who led a good, holy, and even miraculous life, but became perverted at the end, and, dying an unhappy death, was lost forever, we cannot but conclude that there must have been some secret cause to justify the judgments of God. We well know, that there is sometimes an apparent sanctity, a holiness only in outward appearance. There oftentimes exists a secret pride in great corporal austerities, and (as in the case of the Pharisees), monstrous sins hidden under a cloak of seeming virtue on account of which God deprives the secret sinner of the grace of final perseverance.

I conclude with the beautiful exhortation of St. Jerome to a certain layman, who having renounced the vanities of the world, had gone to live a solitary life at Bethlehem, devoting his whole time to the service of God and the salvation of his soul : "I beseech thee, brother, and advise thee with a father's affection, not to turn back to look at the Sodom you have abandoned." My Christian brother ! you, who now have left the city of sin by a good Easter

Confession, and have been re-admitted among the number of the children of God, I beg and implore of you, by the love you owe yourself and your immortal soul, ah! do not look back again! You have laid aside the garment of sin; do not put it on again. You are now in a good state, and if you wish to be assured of salvation, keep on the narrow way that leads to heaven, and return no more to the broad road that conducts to hell.

Nor must you allow yourself to be disheartened by imaginary difficulties. The very obstacles we meet with in the divine service should incite us to all the greater fervor in our determination to persevere in it. Have you ever remarked how a boatman acts on the river, when rowing against the current? If he comes to a place where the eddy of the water and the force of the tide, hinder the boat in her progress, he puts forth all the more strength, he works all the harder with the oars, in order to overcome the resistance of the water; nor does he cease his efforts until he is past that perilous point. So must we act in the spiritual life. When difficulties and dangers are the greatest, then must we be more diligent and earnest, trusting in the help of God to come through successfully; and if we fall, now and then through weakness or frailty, we must not lose heart, nor cease from persevering. The boatman is sometimes, in spite of his efforts, driven back by the opposing current; still, he does not lose courage, but labors all the more diligently, until he has made up for lost time. If a merchant were to give up business when he experiences a slight loss, he would never be a rich man. If a peasant ceased tilling his land when an unfruitful season renders his labor vain, where would his harvests be? Now, if these people do not allow slight difficulties to deter them from their usual labor and toil, how much less should the servant of God be rebuffed by difficulties, since he has an infinitely greater gain and reward to hope for, if he labors assiduously!

Daily renew your purpose of observing the law of God, not lessening your courage by a continual contemplation of the difficulties and chances of the future, but fixing your eyes simply on the

present time. Regard each day as the last of your life (and as a matter of fact, this very hour might be the last for any one of us), and say to yourself : "Can I not keep the good resolutions I made in confession for this one day, at all events ? Who knows whether the Lord will not knock at my door this evening, and call me into eternity ? What would it avail me in that case to have often overcome myself, and resisted my evil inclinations, if at the last moment, I cease persevering and consent to a mortal sin?" Oh, no ! my brethren, act like the patient Job, in joy and sorrow, in prosperity and adversity, in consolation and temptation : "My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake" (Job 27 : 6). The fidelity I have once sworn to God, when he bestowed on me the great grace of forgiveness of my sins, I will observe inviolably. The document I now hold in my hand, and can, if I will, continue to hold, I will never throw away by falling into sin. "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved." I wish to be saved, therefore, God helping me, I will persevere to the end in the love and friendship of God. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

EVIL THOUGHTS.

"*Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you.*"
John 16 : 22.

How sad and forlorn were the hearts of the disciples when their beloved Master said to them : "A little while, and you shall not see me." ! Still, there was some consolation in store for them : "A little while and you shall see me ;" and then your sorrow shall be changed into joy; "your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you." Far more sorrowful is the state of those sinners to whom God can say, after confession: "A little while and you shall not see me!" For, in a little while, by relapsing into sin, they

will drive the divine Guest out of their hearts, and lose his grace and friendship. Perseverance in good is the surest sign of a future resurrection with Christ to glory, and of his possession in heaven; hence, to avoid relapse into sin, and to encourage you to be constant in the divine service, I will now proceed to draw some considerations from that exhortation of the Holy Ghost addressed to us all by the Wise Man: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it" (Prov. 4 : 23). Therefore, O man, carefully guard your heart from all evil thoughts and desires, if you wish to continue in the grace of God and to rejoice with him in heaven. There are two questions which I propose answering in this instruction.

I. Are all evil thoughts sins? And,

II. When are evil thoughts sins?

I. An immense proportion of people imagine that as long as they do nothing wrong in outward act, they need not trouble themselves about their evil thoughts and desires. For instance, a man is grossly insulted. He goes about full of bitterness and enmity, he consents to revengeful thoughts, desires, and plans. Through want of opportunity, or for some other reason, he, perhaps, refrains from fulfilling in act, his plans of revenge. Another, given over to idleness and self-indulgence, allows his imagination to be possessed with all sorts of abominable images. He takes pleasure in those imaginations and impure thoughts. He entertains the evil desire. But through shame, human respect, or want of opportunity, he does nothing wrong outwardly. Now, both these people think themselves innocent, and when they go to confession the one forgets the revengeful, the other the impure thoughts, and neither thinks of repenting of and confessing such thoughts. As long as they abstained from sinning in outward action, they imagine that their thoughts and desires are of no importance. If they happen to hear in a sermon, or elsewhere, that

it is not lawful to consent to bad thoughts and desires, they fall into a still greater error, by persuading themselves that such consent consists only in action, or at least in a firm purpose and eager desire to do the evil deed when opportunity offers.

Such souls are deceived by the devil.

God's justice differs widely from that of man. If I affirmed, even on oath, that, a thousand times, I had a firm purpose of stealing, murdering, or committing adultery, if the occasion were given me, no earthly judge could condemn me on that account; for, if he cannot prove me guilty of the act, he must acquit me. "Man seeth those things that appear," says the Lord God; "but the Lord beholdeth the heart" (1Kings 16 : 7); that is,men judge of nothing,but what they see, while God wishes to have the whole man as an unspotted sacrifice, not only as to his body, but especially, as to his soul and his heart, the most precious part of him. What did it help the foolish virgins that their lamps were clean outwardly,and well-polished, since they had no oil in them? "I know you not," said the heavenly Bridegroom to them, when they knocked at the door; away with you! In vain, does a man flatter himself that he has preserved his purity of body, if his heart is sullied with unchaste thoughts and desires. Therefore, we read: "Take away the evil of your devices from my eyes" (Isai. 1: 16). "Turn ye from your evil ways, and from your wicked thoughts" (Zach. 1: 4). Our divine Lord tells us that we must not even let our desires tend to evil: "But I say to you: that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5: 28).

One can sin, then, by mere thought? Certainly, and that, primarily, more dangerously than by outward act. Primarily, I say, because it is from thoughts that all sins and vices take their origin. Before I do anything evil in action,I must first have the will and determination to do it; and before I can arrive at such a determination, I must necessarily think about it. Therefore, Christ says: "But the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and those things defile a man: for from the heart come forth

evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies," as from the source whence they derive their origin (Matt. 15: 18, 19). Sins of thought are more dangerous, because, according to the words of the Council of Trent, "sometimes they wound the soul more grievously, and are more dangerous, than those which are committed in outward act." Why so? Because they are committed with greater facility and less fear; because they are committed oftener and in greater number; because they are generally more difficult to avoid.

The devil does not try to tempt a pious man at once to an impure act. He sees clearly enough that he would not succeed. But bad thoughts creep into the heart before one is aware of them; and as they do not cause such shame or fear as outward acts do, they force themselves in gradually, until, at last, they are deliberately entertained. "Every one that doth evil, hateth the light" (John 3: 20). The wrong-doer seeks solitude, and even the most abandoned is not so shameless as to sin outwardly and in the presence of others. But in thought and desire one can sin without shame, at all times, in all places; yea, even in the holiest places and occupations, in religious houses, in the wildest deserts, in the churches consecrated to divine service, before the altar and the very eye of God, at devotions and prayers, bad thoughts enter the heart, and often give one enough to do to drive them away.

Who could count the number of sins committed in a month, a week, or even a day, by one who does not know how to guard his heart carefully, and allows it to dwell on bad thoughts? The vindictive, the unchaste man, before gratifying his revenge or his lust, even once in outward act, has already committed a hundred mortal sins of thought; nay, to speak more correctly, his daily thoughts and desires are one continued, uninterrupted sin of the heart.

We read of the husbandman, in the Gospel: "While men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat, and went his way" (Matt. 13: 25). There is a vast difference,

between sowing and planting. The latter takes some time, while the former can be done quickly, and without any trouble. How many seeds cannot one scatter in a quarter of an hour! All you have to do is to open your hand and let them fall over the ground, and they will produce abundant fruit. "His enemy came and oversowed cockle." That is what the devil,our worst enemy, does. He sows the sins we commit in thought and desire. All he has to do is to scatter in the heart and mind a handful of seeds, that is, of impure or other forbidden images, and then he can go his way, and await the result without further trouble. The evil seed once received and nourished in the heart, innumerable sins will be the harvest.

No sins are more difficult to avoid than those which are committed in thought and imagination. Even long after Christians have repented of their sins of impurity, and have made their peace with God, the forbidden pleasures they have once enjoyed frequently recur to the imagination; and those experienced in the matter, tell us that such men have great difficulty in always promptly overcoming such thoughts. Theirs is a grievous and dangerous combat, and one requiring an extraordinary help and grace from God.

Those especially who have led sinful lives never run greater danger of eternal damnation than in their death-agony; for then the raging demon summons up all his strength in order to ruin their souls in the short time that remains to him. He strives to lead into sin, and after sin, to drag down into hell, those who have escaped from him by true repentance. Now, I ask, what sort of a sin would the devil be likely to tempt me to with his suggestions, in my last moments, when I see before my eyes the home of my eternity? To some unlawful, shameful action? No, indeed; for I should not have strength for such a sin as that, nor opportunity, either. Therefore, the aim of his temptations must be thoughts and desires alone. And there is no doubt they are the means by which the demon betrays and perverts those who abandon God at the last moment. O unhappy Christians, who live according to the

wanton desires of the flesh, and rarely reject impure thoughts and desires, how will it fare with you in your last combat, if the devil should try to re-awaken evil desires in your heart, and to represent to your imagination the object of your former unlawful love, the forbidden pleasures you enjoyed! How will you be able to defend yourselves against such temptations then, if you have never properly opposed them during your lives? Will you not, alas! be overcome at the last moment by those assaults of the devil, and hurried down to hell, even after you have confessed your sins with every apparent sign of repentance?

Truly, if the souls of the departed could return to tell us how they fare, we should find a countless number who lost heaven by yielding to evil temptations in their last moments! Amongst a thousand who habitually lead bad lives, you will hardly find one to die a happy death, if he does penance only when death is at his door; partly on account of the danger he runs of not sincerely repenting under such circumstances, and partly on account of the danger of not receiving the grace of final perseverance, although he may have sincerely repented, because he has rendered himself unworthy of that grace during his life. Remember too, how very hard it is for a man who has been accustomed to the odious vice of impurity, and has not learned during life to watch over his heart, to resist bad thoughts and desires even in his last moments. Hence, the Holy Ghost warns us all, in these words: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it." Keep your hearts from sinful thoughts, if you are earnestly desirous to persevere in good, for from the heart comes all that is good and bad. Life and death come forth from it. But, tell us, you say:

II. *When are bad thoughts sins?*

Only when one consents to them—takes pleasure in them. It is one thing to suffer temptations, and another to allow one's self to be overcome by them; it is one thing to have impure images in the imagination, and another to accept those images and deliberately

to take pleasure in them. Therefore, bad thoughts, no matter how horrible they are, as long as one is displeased at them and tries to resist them, are not only not sinful, but bring a great increase of merit for heaven; not only are they not injurious to chastity and purity, but they make that virtue more beautiful and glorious, like gold that is purified by the fire. God allows his dearest children to be tempted by them, that they may increase in humility, acknowledge their misery, fly for refuge to him with greater confidence and earnestness (like a child to its mother, when a barking dog frightens it), and that they may guard their outward senses more carefully, avoid all dangers and occasions of sin, and so increase daily in virtue and gain more glory in heaven by conquering in those combats. Therefore it is consent alone that makes bad thoughts sinful.

Now, there are three ways in which we can deal with bad thoughts; first, meritoriously; second, sinfully; and thirdly (which is the worst of all), by the deliberate desire and intention of exciting the evil thought at the first opportunity

1. God has entrusted to each one of us a soul, to be guarded for him alone as its lawful Lord, since he has bought it with his blood. But the sworn enemy of God and man suggests to that soul evil thoughts. He sends it, as it were, a treacherous letter to persuade it to forsake God, and follow him. He represents to the imagination some alluring object, some enticing beauty, some carnal pleasure, as a reward for the traitorous soul. A pious man, the moment he is aware of the evil thought, puts it away at once out of his mind, thinks of something else, and sends the wicked letter to his Master; that is, he sighs to God in heaven with king Ezechias: "Lord, I suffer violence, answer thou for me" (Isai. 28: 14); the hellish wolf is behind me; help me and do not abandon me! see what a horrible proposal he is making to me! It is against my will, for I am determined to be faithful to thee, my sovereign God, forever! And although those evil thoughts and imaginations return a thousand times, he renews a thousand times his determination,

and is always displeased at them, although the flesh finds pleasure in them. O happy soul! these attacks, these wicked suggestions will not harm you! By their means, you can prove all the better your fidelity to your Master, and can gain still brighter jewels for your crown in heaven.

2. Another, being tempted with bad thoughts, at first continues them through curiosity, and afterwards finds pleasure in deliberately speculating on what is presented to his imagination; although he does not resolve, nor has any desire, to do any impure outward action. He has only a wilful pleasure in the wicked thoughts. Alas! he is already guilty of perjury towards God! The sin is complete, partly,because a wilful,deliberate dwelling on impure thoughts is itself apt to lead to impure feelings, and partly on account of the proximate danger of consenting to unchaste desires.

3. Finally, not only dwells with deliberation on the impure thoughts, when he is aware of them, but also has the wish and desire to accomplish the impure act when he has the opportunity of doing so. This is a far worse sin than the former, and it must be declared exactly in confession. For it would not be enough, for me to say in such a case:"I have had wilful pleasure in impure thoughts;" I must add: "I have also had the deliberate intention of doing the impure act." Moreover, you must declare what kind of an act it was that you wished to do. For instance,you have had a desire to see unchaste things, to be guilty of impure touches, to sin with a single or a married person, or with a near relation, or with one consecrated to God. All these different circumstances must be declared in confession, according to the nature of the sin.

"Therefore, with all watchfulness keep thy heart." Keep your precious soul for your God and Lord, who has given it into your care, and who will one day demand it of you; and that you may do so all the more easily, guard your heart most carefully from all bad thoughts and desires! With what great care does not a man

look after his money, lest it should be stolen from him! He will not allow it to remain on the table, although he may have every faith in the honesty of his servants. It is put away in his safe, and it is well locked. The door of the room in which the safe is kept is bolted and barred. The door of the house and the shutters of the windows are most carefully closed every night; and all this is done to keep a piece of metal from being stolen. Ah, immortal, precious soul, bought by the blood of Jesus Christ! are you, then, of less importance? Must I lose you for a miserable, momentary thought? Lucifer and countless numbers of angels were hurled from heaven to the pit of hell, where they will burn forever, for one momentary, sinful thought. "Alas!" so should each of you say to himself: Woe to me if I, too, should have to burn there for one voluntary bad thought! Unhappy me! how would not the remembrance of my folly torture me!

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

GUARDING THE EYES.

"*And now you shall not see me.*" John 16 : 16.

Humanly speaking, these are strange words. Who could ever imagine that the sacred presence of our Lord Jesus Christ could ever be injurious to his disciples? And yet he says expressly, I am going away from you, and you will not see me any more; "but I tell you the truth; it is expedient to you that I go;" it is better for you not to see me any more. "If I go not," added our Lord, "the Paraclete will not come to you." The consolation you have in my presence is only a sensible one; this must be taken away from you, if you wish to receive the consolation and grace of the Holy Ghost. Now, if the consoling presence of our Lord on earth was incompatible with the presence by grace of the Holy Ghost, how,

then, can that grace abide with wilful, carnal glances at vanities, earthly beauties, or dangerous objects? Oh, certainly, a necessary means of guarding the heart and keeping it in the grace of God is watchfulness over our outward senses, especially the eyes. Hence,

I. He who allows his eyes to wander about curiously on all sides will not long remain free from sin; and

II. In order to persevere in grace, we must all keep custody over our eyes.

I. Amongst all the outward senses there is none from which we can better judge the state of the soul, as to whether it is healthy or not, than from the eyes. "The fornication of a woman shall be known by the haughtiness of her eyes, and by her eye-lids;" (and the same is to be understood of men); therefore, "take heed of the impudence of her eyes" (Ecclus. 26 : 12, 14). It is a rare and unusual occurrence for the fire of lust not to be ignited, when the eyes are allowed to rest needlessly and with satisfaction, on a person of the other sex. Bad thoughts are so many treacherous letters which the enemy of our souls sends to our hearts, to stir up impure images therein, and to persuade us to give up our souls to him. The spies who bring those letters are generally the eyes. "Death is come up through our windows" (Jerem. 9 : 21). The look is followed by the thought, the thought by pleasure, and pleasure by consent.

It is an undoubted truth, discovered even by besotted heathens, that the eyes first lead to impure love; therefore Seleucus, a pagan legislator, commanded that, as a first punishment for adulterers, their eyes should be plucked out, because, as he said, that part should first suffer which was the first cause of the crime. The Holy Scripture often alludes to and condemns the eyes alone, as the chief cause of sin. Thus God, by the prophet Ezechiel, speaking of idolators, declares: "I have broken their heart, that was faithless and revolted from me, and their eyes, that went a whor-

ing after their idols" (Ezech. 6: 7). In the same way he reproaches, not the envious themselves, but their eyes: "The eye of the envious is wicked" (Ecclus. 14: 8). He calls, not the avaricious, but their eyes, insatiable: "The eye of the covetous man is insatiable in his portion of iniquity; he will not be satisfied till he consume his own soul, drying it up" (Ibid. 9). In a word, in order that we may avoid all transgressions of the law, God warns us to mortify our eyes: "Let every man cast away the scandals of his eyes" (Ezech. 20: 7).

Do you intend to avoid sin, and to keep on the right road to heaven? If so, what about your eyes? Do you allow them to wander about unhindered? Do you give them full liberty to gaze on everything that presents itself to them? Do you permit them to look with deliberate curiosity at persons of the opposite sex, and to take pleasure in such looks? Do you wish to see and to be seen? Alas! if so, I venture to prophesy, no matter how innocent, pious, and firm may be your present good resolutions, your piety will not last long. You will not have a chaste heart, if your eyes are not modest. In a short time, you will be forced to sigh forth, with the prophet Jeremias: "My eye hath wasted my soul!" (Lament. 3: 51.) My soul was once rich in the treasures of divine grace which it had arduously collected. Alas! one curious look has robbed me of all those riches. "I saw and was lost," you will have to acknowledge with the poet. In the morning, I confessed my sins with the firm resolution rather to die a thousand times than again offend my God. Yet, on the very same day, I looked on a dangerous object, and stained my conscience by a new sin: "I saw and was lost." After hearing that sermon on the eternal truths, I thought heaven and earth would perish before I would consent to offend my God again; but, alas! one imprudent glance has made me forget my resolution: "I saw, and was lost." I went into the church in a state of innocence, to hear holy Mass, and to beg many graces from God, but I came away laden with mortal sin, the result of a single lustful glance at another's beauty. "I saw, and was lost." "Lust," says St. Thomas of Aquin, "can hardly be avoided, unless its begin-

ning, namely looking at a woman's beauty, be avoided." Therefore, the Holy Ghost warns us: "Look not upon a woman, lest thou fall into her snares: gaze not upon a maiden, lest her beauty be a stumbling block to thee; look not round about thee in the ways of the city, nor wander up and down in the streets thereof: turn away thy face from a woman dressed up, and gaze not upon another's beauty" (Ecclus. 9: 3, 5, 7, 8).

"What?" some will say: "must we, then, go about like blind men? Why has my Creator given me eyes, if not that I may use them? And what harm is it for me to look at what pleases me?" I answer: Your Creator has given you ears to hear; are you, therefore, allowed to hear anything you please? He has given you a tongue to speak; can you therefore say whatever you like? He has given you hands to stretch forth, but not to take everything you please. And yet you are not obliged to go about deaf, dumb, or lame. Truly, you have eyes to see with, but not to look at everything you please. Otherwise, the Holy Ghost would not warn you so often to keep from gazing at another's beauty; yet you are not forced on that account to go about like a blind man. "What harm is there in it?" you ask. And I ask you: What harm is it for a little child to take a sharp knife in its hand? And yet you do not allow him to keep it. Why? He has not yet cut himself with it. "That may be," you reply; "but it is very dangerous, and he might hurt himself with it." Seeing in itself is not sinful; but take care lest it be the beginning of sin.

What harm was it for Eve to look at the forbidden fruit in paradise? And yet, that one look brought death to her and to us all. Ah! said Eve, let me look at it! do not be afraid; I will only admire the fruit. I will not stretch forth my hand to pluck it. I am not forbidden to look, but only to eat. Alas, if Eve had not looked, she would not have eaten, and she and all of us would not have lost paradise! Eating followed seeing, and the sin was consummated. What harm was it for the wife of Putiphar to look at her servant Joseph? Yet when she did so, shame, honor, and conjugal fidelity were cast to the winds. What harm was it for David,

that holy king, to look out through the windows of his palace at Bethsabee? And yet, if he had not done so, he would not have become an adulterer and a murderer. What harm was it for Ammon to look at his own sister? And yet those looks of his led him into incest. But what need is there of further proof? Often enough in our own days, we hear converted sinners giving expression to this heartfelt wish: "Ah! would that I had never seen that person; I would not have fallen into sin!"

Therefore, keep the windows closed, if you do not wish to be robbed of your greatest treasure! Guard your eyes carefully, if you really wish to persevere in the friendship of God! If an angel had foretold to our first mother in paradise what would follow if she looked at the forbidden fruit, would she have been so incautious as not to have mortified her eyes? If the prophet Nathan had said to David when the latter opened the window of his palace, and was about to look out into his garden: "O David, what are you about to do? It would be better for you to fall down and break your neck than give that one unguarded look! You will forget your God, you will become a murderer and an adulterer, your favorite child will die; dishonor will come upon your house, your son Absalom will drive you from your throne and persecute you until he dies on a tree in the state of sin and is lost forever; you will be made a laughing-stock to your own subjects, who will vilify and throw stones at you like a hunted dog, and all this will be as a punishment for your sin!" If such a dreadful announcement had been made to that then pious king, would he have been so foolish as still to have gratified his curiosity? That is not likely. And yet, one incautious glance, without his foreseeing any harm, or having the least bad intention, brought all that evil on him.

Dissolute young man! vain girl! weak mortals! I am neither a prophet, nor an angel; yet, I warn you that if you do not learn to keep your eyes always in check; if you give them full liberty to gaze at everything that offers itself to them; if you cast them freely on persons of the opposite sex; if you mix unrestrainedly in

all kinds of company, you may be assured that it will soon be all up with your purity of heart. You will be guilty of murder and incest, if not in reality, at least in inclination and desire. Some of you will be tormented, day and night, by the spirit of impure love, which will give you no rest; some will seek opportunities, and consume the best years of their lives in impurity; some will be addicted to that vice till their old age, nay, till their death; some will perhaps indulge in it publicly, before the whole town. And then, hear what follows: "Thus saith the Lord: If any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are."

II. If curiosity of the eyes is to be avoided with regard to dangerous objects, or persons, it is even more necessary with regard to dangerous reading. Just as there is nothing more useful for us if we wish to persevere in good, and to become more devout, than the reading of spiritual books, so also there is nothing more injurious, especially to holy purity, than the reading of books that treat of unchaste subjects and impure love. This is an accursed invention of the devil, with which he endeavors to infect hearts, as with a pestilence. His attacks in this way are directed chiefly against the young, whom he tries to bewitch, and to lead astray; nor is he hardly ever disappointed. If he can but induce a person to read a bad book through curiosity, he is tolerably sure of his soul. Alas, he scatters those abominable books abroad in all places, at all times, by wicked agents. Are not we poor mortals already versed enough, by our own corruption in this filthy knowledge, without being taught it by these agents of the devil? The crafty tempter well knows that with the ordinary run of good Christians he can do little by openly immoral books. Such books would rather disgust than attract them. In order then to ensnare their souls, he places before their eyes amusing comedies, well-written romances, sensational love-stories, full of passion, which are in reality more dangerous to souls, the more cunningly they conceal the filth they contain, the more they are able to amuse,

and the more eager they make the reader to know the end of the story ; for they fill the heart and mind with violent and unruly desires and softly fan the flames of impure passion, feeding it and keeping it alive. Eternal truths, which should and ought to lead us to heaven, are often explained in sermons, and are sometimes listened to with pleasure! But, alas, how soon are they lost sight of! Hardly is the sermon over, when they are forgotten ! But these love stories and romances generally so captivate the imagination and the memory of young people, that sometimes they are never forgotten. But, one may say: There is nothing wrong in those books, Father I read them only for the sake of the style,—for the skill shown in developing the plot. A fine excuse, indeed! You must be a great admirer of elegant language! There are enough Lives of the Saints and like spiritual books published (good specimens even of a better style, and filled with still more wonderful and true incidents), which elevate the mind and heart to heaven and heavenly things, and teach us how to amend our lives. Why do you not read those books with the same pleasure and eagerness? They are not mere fictions, which betray your understanding ; they are true, and can instruct you not only in the beauties of style, but also in the duties of a Christian life. Ah ! tell the truth, do you not slight those good books because their contents do not gratify your sensuality ? And even if those romances and love tales were better written, should you not be more anxious about the purity of your soul than about the elegance of your style ? more careful to live well, than to speak well ? to be learned in the school of Christ, than in that of the demon of impurity ?

Do you wish to act as a good Christian ? Then pitch those filthy books at once into the fire, as an agreeable burnt-offering to God. Better for you to do that, than for one soul to be cast by them into the fire of hell.

"Woe to the man by whom the scandal cometh!" I must cry out here, in the threatening words of God to all those who give to others occasion of sin, by placing bad books in their way, or

by allowing them to look at indecent statues or bad pictures, or by not observing the rules of modesty in their own dress ; for all those things are so many snares to catch souls and to betray them into the clutches of the devil. Theologians teach that a woman (and the same is to be understood of a man) who knows for certain that she is the object of an impure affection commits a mortal sin if, without necessity or reasonable cause, she puts herself deliberately in the way of being seen by that person, although she has no intention or wish to excite an impure passion in him. Now, if the law of Christian charity binds every one, to avoid giving others such an occasion of sin, even when clad with a due regard to modesty, how shall they answer to God for their actions, who deliberately place in the way of others objects that, of their nature, are apt to incite them to sinful thoughts and desires ? All the sins others commit through his instrumentality will be recorded against him, although he may not have had the deliberate wish or intention to lead others into sin.

I might here give vent to a bitter complaint against those careless parents, who allow their innocent little children to see things that would be unlawful amongst unmarried people. Let no one tell me that the children are too young, and that they do not understand. Granted that they do not understand it now, are not the impressions of such things imprinted on their imaginations and memories, so that they will never be eradicated ? If you have not another room in your house for your children, it were better to let them go and stay in the pig-sty, than see what could be an occasion of scandal to them, and ruin their precious souls. There are parents who toil and moil from morning till night, while their daughters do nothing but deck themselves out in the latest fashions, and let themselves be seen. Parents, watch over your children more carefully ! Fish are never safe, unless when in water. If they leave their own element, they die in a short time. Never are your daughters safer that at home, under your own eyes, and occupied with some work befitting their condition. The goods exposed constantly in the shop windows are either dam-

aged, or are in a fair way to become so. No matter how pious, devout, and innocent your daughters may be, if they are fond of seeing and being seen, although they may not do anything wrong outwardly, yet they will have wickedness enough in their hearts. When young maidens begin to go about too freely, they soon lose their virtue, as their hearts become sullied with sinful thoughts and desires.

Christian parents, I beseech of you, listen to the warning of holy Writ: "On a daughter that turneth not away herself, set a strict watch; lest, finding an opportunity, she abuse herself" (Eccles. 26 : 13). Father, look after your son! Mother, watch over your daughter, and keep her constantly at work at home: "Take heed of the impudence of her eyes, and wonder not if she slight thee" (Ibid. 14). If you let her have too much of her own way, you must not be surprised to find her dead to all shame in the end. And know, that the Lord will require her soul at your hands. Christians, of whatever condition, sex, or age you may be, guard your eyes from all curious and vain glances, if you wish to persevere in the grace and service of God. Alas! in what fragile vases we carry about the precious treasure of sanctifying grace! Our own carnal desires of themselves are always dragging us down into sin, and we are often forced to complain of our weakness and evil inclinations. Why, then, should we open the doors and windows to further temptations? Say to yourselves, each one of you: Have a little patience, O my eyes! restrain yourselves for a short time! The beauty of creatures is not worth your consideration! In a little while, I will give you pleasure enough in heaven, where you may gaze forever on the infinite loveliness of God, on Jesus Christ, the most beautiful of the children of men, on Mary, the beautiful Spouse of the Holy Ghost, and on all the glories of the elect of God! Reserve your curiosity till then! Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

PRAYER FOR PERSEVERANCE IN GOOD.

"*Ask, and you shall receive.*" John 16 : 24.

I have already spoken to you of different means that we must make use of in order to persevere in good. One of them is to guard the heart from bad thoughts and desires ; another, to guard the eyes from dangerous curiosity. But all this will be of little use, if we omit praying to God, or pray but seldom. Learn then,

I. That fervent prayer to God is not only a necessary means to perseverance and salvation for all men; but it is

II. For some, the only means of salvation.

I. "All our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. 3: 5). We are mortals, who, without the supernatural help and grace of God, are not only incapable of attaining eternal salvation, but cannot even make the least move towards it. Moreover, we are inclined to evil of our own corrupt nature, and are blown hither and thither, like reeds by the wind, by our inordinate appetites and desires, by pride, avarice, anger, impatience, hatred, envy, lust, nay, according to the repeated assertions of the Apostles, we are the bond-slaves of sin ; so that, if a man were abandoned to his own natural strength, without the supernatural assistance of God, although retaining the power of free will, he could not (humanly speaking), long refrain from sin. Thus miserable and frail as we are, where do we live? In the midst of a perverse world, the arena, wherein we have to contend, day and night, with countless enemies, who far surpass us in strength and power; in the midst of a thousand temptations and dangers; dangers, from the demons who surround us on all sides, and are unceasingly occupied in trying to bring about our eternal ruin, dangers from men, who lead each other into sin by bad example, by promises, threats, allurements, and flattery; dangers from

prosperity, which generally turns away the human heart from God and heavenly things, and fixes it on earthly goods; dangers from adversity, and the many trials of life, which drive men to despair; dangers, at home; dangers, abroad!—Ah, no matter where we turn, we find snares set to entrap us to eternal ruin! Well might each one of us say with Josaphat, when he was surrounded by the enemy on all sides: "As for us, we have not strength enough to be able to resist this multitude, which cometh violently upon us. But as we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to God" (2 Paralip. 20: 12), and humbly implore his assistance.

And that is just what God requires of us. God does not wish us to pray to him for the same reason that beggars are forced to ask alms from the rich: namely, to declare their poverty, or to excite pity and commiseration for their needs. No, the all-knowing Lord is better acquainted with our wants than we are ourselves. "Your Father knoweth what is needful for you," says Christ, "before you ask him" (Matt. 6: 8). He knows your miseries before you expose them to him: and he has greater pity for our wretchedness than a good mother has for her sick child. Why, then, is it necessary for us to implore the help of God, if he already knows what we want, if his Fatherly love already inclines him to help us? It is true that God knows already what help and grace we are in need of from him; and that he can give us his grace without our co-operation, if he wishes to do so; but as a general rule, he will not give us any grace, the first alone excepted, unless we humbly ask it of him. God could have caused the fruits of the earth to come forth of themselves; but he does not do so. He requires us to do work, to till the fields, and sow the seed. In the same way he wishes all men to be eternally happy in heaven, and to that end, he is ready to give us all the assistance of his grace in liberal measure, but on the condition that we ask it of him; so that we may always humbly acknowledge that he is the sole Lord and Giver of all grace, on whom depends our temporal and spiritual welfare.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock,

and it shall be opened to you" (Matt. 7 : 7). That is to say, he who asks not, receives nothing ; he who seeks not, finds nothing ; and he who knocks not at the door of grace, shall find it closed against him. Hence, the Lord repeats again and again to us his exhortation to turn to him. "Cry to me" (Jerem. 33 : 3). "Let nothing hinder thee from praying always" (Ecclus. 18 : 22). "Watch ye and pray" (Matt. 26 : 41). "We ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18 : 1). "Pray without ceasing" (Thess. 5 : 17). "Watch in prayers" (1 Pet. 4 : 7). The holy Fathers, explaining the necessity of prayer, compare it to a channel whereby all heavenly gifts and graces flow down on the human soul ; to a chain, by which we draw ourselves up to God ; to a key, by which we open heaven ; to a bulwark, behind which we take refuge from all the assaults of our enemies. Prayer is like food, because we cannot live long without it. It is like air, and is as necessary to us as the air we breathe, nay, as the soul is to the body. Take away from the body its food, its breath, its soul, and what will become of it ? So with the soul, if you deprive it of prayer. Not to pray, and still to try to persevere in good ; not to pray, and still to desire heaven ; not to pray, and still to hope to remain free from sin, is to tempt God, to desire a miracle from him ; it is like trying to see without light, to speak without a tongue, to hear without ears, to walk without feet. No one can work out his salvation without the help of God, and no one receives that help, unless he prays. It is a sheer impossibility. It must be evident to all, that it is absolutely impossible to live virtuously without prayer. Therefore, I implore you always to have prayer at hand as your most assured refuge.

II. Prayer is not only a necessary means to salvation, but it is often the *only* means which God has ordained for many. It is the only means for the sinner to bring him to the knowledge of his unhappy state and to true repentance and conversion. If he does not use that means, humbly begging of God the grace of true contrition, no other grace will ever be given him. It is the only means for that man who is in the midst of temptation ; and if he

does not use it, if he does not cry to God for help, he will certainly fall into sin. It is the only means for that oppressed individual, in order to enable him to bear his crosses and trials with patience and merit for his soul. If he does not use it and earnestly beg of God the grace of patience, he will not receive strength or comfort, and he may even despair. It is the only means for that just man to persevere in the state of grace. If he does not use it, and often cry to God for help, he will be perverted and fall into sin. Says Job on the dunghill: "My whole body is a mass of corruption; nothing but lips are left about my teeth" (Job 19 : 20); as if to say, in the person of the sinner: Everything about me is in a lost and despairing condition; all I have left are my lips and tongue, wherewith to pray to God and implore his grace and mercy! Constant prayer is necessary for a man, if he wishes to save his soul.

Will any one of you say: I cannot keep the commandments? Why not? I ask. You may reply: Christ commands me to love my enemy from my heart, to forgive and forget all the injuries he has inflicted on me, and even to do good to him. Now, I cannot do that; it is impossible. No matter what efforts I make, I cannot drive away the recollection of the injuries that man has inflicted on me. The very sight of him makes the blood rush to my face. I cannot force myself to greet him in a friendly manner, and as to loving and doing him good, it is utterly impossible. What a terrible thing to say! Hear what St. Augustine says: "You are mistaken, my good friend; God does not command us to do impossible things; but when he lays his commands on us, he exhorts us to fulfil them, as far as we can, and to ask from him help to do what is beyond our power; and then he helps to do it." There you have the proof of your mistake, or rather of your obstinacy. You do not feel any salutary inclination to forgive injuries and to love your enemy; this grace of God is wanting in you, I grant you that; but you have another grace, which is never wanting to you. And what is that? The permission to pray, which God has placed in your hands as an instrument by which you may obtain

the other grace of loving your enemy, nay, every grace that is necessary and advantageous for your salvation; and you may be infallibly certain that you will receive them, for God has bound himself and given his word, to deny nothing to prayer. Therefore, if you cannot pardon and love your enemy, you can, at all events, pray. Pray then, and you will get that grace as infallibly, as it is certain as that God's promises cannot deceive. If you refuse to do that, then there is no help for you; but you must attribute your misfortune to no one but yourself alone.

Another complains and says: "Ah, would that I were in a different state of life, in which I might serve God and save my soul in peace and quiet!" Why do you wish that? "Because I am in the midst of the turmoil of the world, in which there are, every day, so many dangers to be avoided, so many snares to be detected, so many temptations and allurements to be overcome. I cannot save myself from a fall. I sin here, and there, so that I must despair of salvation." Nonsense! God does not command you to do impossibilities. If he has called you to that state, pray, at least (for that you can always do), for grace to fulfil your duties in it and the Lord God, in virtue of his promise, will make it possible for you. If you refuse to do that, there is no help for you.

"I cannot be patient," complains a third. Why not? "Because so many crosses and trials come upon me, one after the other, every day of my life. It is too much, altogether; it is intolerable! I cannot even form a good thought, anxious though I may be to do so; much less, can I resign myself to the will of God with patience. I have no consolation, either from heaven, or earth, from God or man! I am actually driven to despair!" Do not say that! You can be patient if you wish; and if you cannot, you can, at all events, pray for the grace. If you do not cease praying, I assure you, in the name of God, who has promised to deny nothing to fervent prayer, that you will experience spiritual comfort and consolation in your crosses, no matter how heavy they may be.

"I cannot keep from certain sins," says a fourth. Why not? "The bad habit of such a vice has now grown inveterate with me.

I cannot withstand the temptations and assaults that are made on me, day and night ; they are so violent and impetuous, that I cannot resist them, and must succumb !" What do you mean by that ? Does not St. Paul say expressly, that "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it"? (1 Cor. 10 : 13). And you, too, can withstand your wicked desires, or any other temptations, no matter how violent they are. If you have not the grace to do so, then, at all events, you can pray for it. But if you refuse to pray and do not appeal to God to help you, then you must not be surprised at your weakness and frailty.

There are non-Catholics, who may allege by way of excuse for their heresy that God did not give them the gift and light of the true faith. I grant that they have not received that gift ; but they could have asked God for it ; and if they had done so, they would certainly have received it. Are there any such here ? To them, I cry out : "Precious, dear souls ! you, too, are bought by the blood of Jesus Christ ; you are created for heaven as well as I and all men ! I would willingly do all in my power to bring you to heaven ; but you must know that he that believeth not, shall be condemned" (Mark 16 : 16). Reason teaches you, too, that there can be but one true faith ; for the God of truth cannot say yes and no to the same article of belief. It cannot be true, for instance, that Jesus Christ instituted seven Sacraments for Catholics, and, only two, or three, for you ! otherwise God would be guilty of deception and contradiction, and either your religion or ours would be false. But I do not wish to dispute with you now as to the truth of our respective religions. One request only I make of you : pray, call out to God : My Lord and my God ! Thou hast created me for eternal happiness ; my only wish and desire is to come to thee in heaven, otherwise it were better for me that I never were born ! Now I beg of thee, by the precious Blood that Jesus Christ thy Son, our Saviour, shed for me, lead me on in the way of salvation ! If I am in the right way, al-

ready, keep me in it; but if I am in the wrong, then I implore of thee show me the truth, and grant me to embrace it, and save my soul!

Another truth which follows from the foregoing is this: the state of the man who gives up prayer, or who calls on God for help in a slothful and distracted fashion, is a most miserable and desperate one. Why? Because to give up prayer means to neglect the most necessary means of salvation. All other means, good and meritorious works, and even the holy Sacraments themselves, necessary and useful as they always are to our souls, can be supplied in some other way, when there is no opportunity of having recourse to them. If I cannot fast on account of ill health, I can make up for it by alms-giving or other good works. If I have no opportunity of confessing my sins, I can obtain forgiveness for them by an act of perfect contrition. Even if I have not an opportunity of receiving Baptism, I can make up for it by desire, and by a perfect love of God. But nothing can take the place of prayer. If I refuse to pray, I have nothing on which to ground, with any degree of certainty, my hopes of salvation. Without prayer, in the present disposition of divine Providence, God does not, as a general rule, bestow his graces. Without prayer we cannot receive the grace of repentance, of divine love, of final perseverance and a happy death, in short, eternal salvation. A sinner, no matter how wicked he is, as long as he prays for the grace of conversion and amendment, has not yet lost all hope. But if he goes so far as to lose the spirit of prayer, or not to have an earnest desire that his prayers should be heard, then one might say of him with truth: That man is blinded, hardened, and obstinate in sin. Therefore the penitent David praises and blesses God with a grateful heart: "Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me" (Ps. 65 : 20), that is to say: Blessed be God, who, after all the sins I have committed, has left me still the love of prayer! Therefore, Christians, whatever we do, let us pray! Whatever good works we neglect, let us not give up prayer. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

AVOIDING BAD AND DANGEROUS COMPANY.

"*These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized.*"
John 16 : 1.

Those parts of the body that especially scandalize the soul, or lead it into sin, are the eyes, the hands, and the feet. "If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee" (Matt. 18 : 9), that its dangerous glances may not lead you into sin. "If thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee," the former by dangerous touches, the latter by leading you into the danger of sin, "cut it off and cast it from thee" (Matt. 18 : 8). Therefore I say that to persevere in divine grace, we especially guard against

I. Bad company, and

II. Dangerous company.

I. Man above all other creatures, is an imitative animal. This, we daily remark in little children, whose sole occupation is, generally speaking, the imitation of others Indeed, if we duly consider the matter, many kinds of art, which are highly esteemed in the world, are hardly anything else but imitations. Painters, sculptors, engravers, musicians, employ their greatest skill in imitating nature, and in representing each subject as it is created by God. Actors, imitate as closely as possible the persons of kings, peasants, soldiers, and beggars, representing the different passions of anger, love, grief, joy, and so on. And what are the manners, customs, fashions and speech of mankind but imitations, by which each man follows his neighbor's example, and behaves exactly as he sees others behaving? Hence, the philosopher Aristotle remarks: "It is natural to men from their childhood to imitate others, and in that way they differ from other animals."

This consideration and also the fact that our nature has been corrupted by the sin of our first parents, is the basis of the proposition I have undertaken to prove : namely, that he who deliberately frequents bad company cannot long remain good and holy. If we were all so constituted as to be ready to imitate the good qualities we see or hear of in others, things would be different. It would then be a desirable thing for the good to mix with the wicked; nor would the pious be corrupted by bad example, as the wicked would rather learn from the good. "With the holy thou wilt be holy, and with the innocent man thou wilt be innocent, and with the elect thou wilt be elect ; and with the perverse thou wilt be perverted" (Ps. 17 : 26, 27). "He that toucheth pitch,shall be defiled with it;"and he that hath fellowship with the proud, shall put on pride (Ecclus. 13: 1).

One bad companion is often more than enough to corrupt and lead astray a number of people. Have you ever heard that a scabby sheep became sound by going with healthy sheep ? No ; but if the shepherd does not separate it from the flock at once, it will infect all the others. Mix rotten apples with good ones, and in a short time, the whole lot will get bad ; twenty good apples will become bad, if one rotten one is put amongst them. The celebrated statue that king Nabuchodonosor saw in his dream, the head of which was of gold, the shoulders and breast of silver, the body of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet part of iron and part of clay, fell to the ground shattered in pieces, so that it became dust and was blown away by the wind. What was it that destroyed such a great statue ? A single stone that fell from the mountain on its feet. Suppose that in a family the head is of pure gold, namely, the father is pure as gold as to his conduct and life ; the mother is refined as silver ; the children as modest and reserved as brass ; the servants, by their industry and diligence, as strong and faithful as iron. Lo ! one stone of scandal, thrown among them, is enough to destroy the whole beautiful statue. A wicked servant comes into a family the members of which lead holy lives ; an immoral companion finds his way in ; the children are intrusted

to some devil's teacher for their education. Alas, that is quite enough to shatter to pieces the beautiful gold, silver, and brass, to ruin the morals and destroy the harmony of that family, and change its virtue into vice! "Know you not," says St. Paul, "that a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump?" (1 Cor. 5 : 6.) A married woman who is too free in her conduct, and is not sufficiently observant of the fidelity she owes her husband, is a source of scandal to a whole neighborhood. A badly reared, corrupt child can infect a whole school by his bad example; a bold, vain worldling, dressed in an immodest fashion, casts a stone of scandal into the eyes and hearts of a whole town. Now, if one wicked person can do so much harm, and influence the thoughtless to follow his bad example, what will he not have to fear who recklessly goes into bad company and does not care with whom he associates?

And what will become of those children who are not sufficiently looked after; who are allowed to run about the streets all day and part of the night, with low companions; who have permission to go where they wish, to speak and play with whom they please; whose parents trouble their heads little about what servants they have, as long as the work of the house is done, and who allow their children to be on intimate terms with the servants? Is it any wonder that, with such bad companions around them, the children are instructed in wickedness from their very cradles? Ah, Christian parents, look after your children carefully in this particular, if you wish them to be eternally happy in heaven. Take pattern by the pious Sara. She once saw her son, the little Isaac, playing with the son of her handmaid Agar, who was certainly not well brought up. Filled with a holy jealousy: "Cast out this bond-woman and her son" (Gen. 21 : 10), she cried out to Abraham; otherwise your son Isaac cannot remain good. Cast out, not only the dissolute child, but his mother also; the evil must be torn up by the roots. Christian father! out of the house with that servant, that maid, from whom your children can neither see, hear, nor learn anything good! Away with all young men from whom your daughters can expect nothing but sentimental

folly, or still worse, the breathings of sensual passion, even if they are of decent families, nay, even if they are of your own blood-relations.

And all of you, without exception, fly bad company, if you expect to remain good and holy. "Depart from the tents of these wicked men," such was the warning given by Moses to the Israelites, and which God now gives to all of us, "and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be involved in their sins" (Num. 16 : 26). And not only must we flee company that is actually bad, in which attempts are openly made to lead us astray by talk and conversation, by advice and teaching, by flattery and caresses, and in which a bad example of vindictiveness, injustice, drunkenness, impurity or other vice is given us, but we must also shun

II. Dangerous company.

By dangerous company, I mean that in which one is likely to commit sin, at least in thought. Such company must, as far as possible, be avoided by those who are anxious to save their souls; for, according to the words of the Holy Ghost, "He that loveth danger shall perish in it" (Ecclus. 3 : 27). He who goes unnecessarily into danger, or who loves it, will certainly fall into sin. For instance, he who frequents ale-houses or drinking-saloons, although he may not have had any bad intention at first, soon places his soul in danger. In such places are sure to be found certain reckless characters who drink to excess, detract from their neighbor's fair fame, curse and swear, or indulge in immodest buffoonery and unchaste discourses and songs. And even if there were no danger of the kind, yet we should be deterred from going to such houses by the fear of contracting intemperate habits.

Again, dangerous company for all is the too free and unrestricted intercourse with persons of the opposite sex. I am speaking now merely of those who seek such company without reasonable cause, and solely because they like it, and who make it an occasion of laughing, joking, and otherwise amusing themselves. Who can doubt that there is danger in such company?

Every one will say that we are likely to have rain, when the air feels damp, the sky is covered with dark clouds, and the wind comes from the West. All agree that a long-continued fever is a dangerous illness for a weak, wasted body. And even if the rain does not fall, nor the sick man die, yet the danger of rain or of death has been evident enough; for the danger of an evil consists in the combination of those circumstances from which the evil is likely to follow and does often follow. Now, when two or more people of different sexes are together (and that is like putting fire and straw together), with the intention of amusing one another, and doing their best to make themselves mutually agreeable, laughing and joking to their hearts' content, without any restraint upon their eyes, their tongues, their ears, or their limbs, are not all such in evident danger of sin?

But, among decent people (you urge), there cannot be danger of anything wrong being committed! There is no danger of anything outwardly wrong being done; I grant, that may be. But *that* there is no danger of anything wrong being done in thought and desire; that I deny altogether. Not without reason does God admonish us to be most careful in this respect: "Sit not at all with another man's wife" (Ecclus. 9 : 12). When necessity does not require it, you must not even sit beside a person of the opposite sex; and the reason is given in the same chapter: "Many have perished by the beauty of a woman, and hereby lust is enkindled as a fire. Many, by admiring the beauty of another man's wife, have become reprobate; for her conversation burneth as a fire" (Ibid. 9 : 11). Ah, how many have been perverted in that way! Hear what St. Agustine says in reference to occasions that some in his presence were maintaining to be of small account and not very dangerous. Laying his hand on his bosom, as if he wished to confirm by an oath the truth of his words, he said: "Believe me, I have seen the cedars of Lebanon, men who were more firmly rooted in virtue, and whose minds were raised higher towards heaven, than the loftiest cedars; I have seen them fall to the ground in such occasions and company, so that I wondered at it no less, nor was less terrified by it, than if

I had beheld a St. Jerome falling from the height of his sanctity and becoming a public sinner, or a St. Ambrose denying the faith." In the Lives of the Saints we read of men who were models of holiness, men of great perfection and of long-tried virtue, who lived apart from the world in convents or deserts, spending their time in works of penance and mortification, till their bodily strength was exhausted ; veterans, who, after having long fought under the standard of Jesus Christ, at last fell into the most shameful crimes. And who was able to make them fall like that? The devil cannot boast of doing it in his own person. For years, he had made war on them ; he had appeared to them in the shape of fierce lions, of swine, and of oxen, and beaten them till they were half dead; but he was not able to conquer them. The cause of their ruin was a woman, with whom they at first began a holy conversation, and then committed sin. O dangerous company! which can pervert even a heroic saint, and turn the brightest stars of the heavens into fire-brands of hell! And yet people think so lightly of it nowadays! It is even sought for expressly, and made a matter of previous arrangement; while the impure thoughts and desires that arise in such company are not even made matter of confession, since people deceive themselves by imagining that they did not consent to those thoughts. What! Not consent to them? Did you not voluntarily occasion the cause from which such thoughts arise?

Christians, he that loveth danger shall perish in it ; such is my conclusion in the words of the Holy Ghost. Thinking of this, let us carefully avoid dangerous company, and not venture into it unless we are compelled by necessity, or by our position or duty. Especially, must we shun that company in which we know by experience that our hearts will be turned away from heaven and let to grovel in the mire of earth. If even when alone, we cannot sometimes avoid temptation, why should we wantonly seek the occasion of many temptations? Ah, each one of us, must acknowledge with Thomas à Kempis: "As often as I went amongst men, I returned less a man." Therefore, if solitude becomes tedious to

me, if I find it hard to keep away from dangerously delightful company, I will think: If it is now so hard for me to remain alone a short time, what will it be hereafter, when I shall have to spend eternity in the flames of hell, surrounded by demons? To avoid that terrible company, should any present difficulty or weariness seem too great? Let us reflect in our meditations on that beautiful heaven wherein we hope to live forever in the society of the Angels and Saints, eternally praising God! Let us say with St. Paul: "But our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory" (Phil. 3 : 20, 21), so that, with glorified bodies and illumined by the light of glory, we may rejoice with the elect for all eternity. Amen.

PENTECOST.

THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD, A PRESERVATIVE AGAINST SIN.

"*We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him.*"
John 14: 23.

So much does God, who is all-sufficient to himself, love a poor mortal who loves him, that, not satisfied with dwelling in heaven and earth, he wishes to dwell in that man personally with his whole divine essence. "If any man love me," he says, "he will keep my word, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him," that is, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost will take up their dwelling within him. Just souls, children of God, rejoice and exult, that this great honor is yours! Oh! be most careful never to lose by mortal sin the great Guest, your God, who dwells in and with you. And to avoid that misfortune, always remember

1. That the best and surest means of avoiding all sin is the constant recollection of the presence of God; and therefore,

II. That he who wishes to be free from sin and to have his God dwelling in him, must always think to himself: God beholds me.

I. When simple souls see a rope-dancer performing his tricks, they sometimes come to the conclusion, that he does them by the aid of witchcraft or sorcery. For what wonderful things does not the rope-dancer do on the slender rope suspended high in the air! He dances and leaps about with the weight of his whole body, bending backwards and forwards, as confidently as if he were on the ground. He makes somersaults in the air and alights on his feet; he hangs on the rope by an arm or a leg, and in a moment is on his feet again. Nay, sometimes he wheels a barrow over the rope, and rarely does he get a fall. "How is that possible?" says the simple peasant; you may say what you will, but that man has surely dealings with the devil. And yet the whole thing is natural enough. It only requires a certain bodily dexterity and agility, which can be acquired by practice. How does the rope-dancer keep himself from falling? He has a long pole in his hands, with equal weights at either end, that help him to keep his balance. But that is not all; the chief thing consists in the man's keeping his eyes fixed on a ring or globe, beside which there is a lighted candle. That is the point at which he must look constantly, in order not to lose his balance. During the performance, he never turns his eyes away from it, and even if he sways a little to one side, now and then, his gaze is still fixed on that central point. If he were to turn away from it, and begin to stare around him, neither his skill nor the balancing pole would be of the least assistance to him; he would certainly lose his balance, fall, and break his neck.

We may compare to a rope-dancer each and every one who wishes to keep straight on the road to heaven. In this world, we are exposed to far more and far greater dangers than the rope-dancer, and if we fall, it is not so much the ruin of the mortal body as of the immortal soul. Wherever we go, we are walking in the midst of snares and traps set for our destruction at all times, and in all

places. The prophet David says of the dangers and occasions of sin: "The cords of the wicked have encompassed me" (Ps. 139: 6). "The proud have hid a net for me: and they have stretched out cords for a snare: they have laid for me a stumbling block by the way-side" (Ibid. 139: 6). Oh, how deplorable is the fall of the just man! He seemed to have vaulted even to the heights of heaven. He shone in virtue and sanctity like the stars of the firmament, yet, in an unguarded moment, he fell headlong down from the mountain-tops of righteousness into the depths of mortal sin! How shameful was the fall of David himself! Although he had ascended even to the heart of God; by one incautious glance he was turned from a just man into an adulterer and a murderer! How disgraceful the fall of Solomon, his son, the wisest man that ever lived! In spite of all his wisdom, he allowed himself to be ensnared by carnal love. He forgot his God, and bent the knee before dumb idols. How terrible the fall of Judas, the chosen apostle of Jesus Christ! Blinded by the love of money, he was changed from a saint into a despairing demon. With reason does St. Paul cry out to us all: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10: 12).

What are we to do, what means must we make use of, to keep our balance and to avoid the danger of a fall? We must make use of a pole and of a light like the rope-dancer, but our pole must be the fear of God—our light, the remembrance of the presence of God. "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance," as in that of a lighted candle, "and in thy name, they shall rejoice all the day" (Ps. 88: 16, 17). "My eyes are ever towards the Lord," David says of himself before his fall, "for he shall pluck my feet out of the snare" (Ibid. 24: 15), and will keep me from falling. His wise son gives us the same warning in the Book of Proverbs: "Have confidence in the Lord with all thy heart; in all thy ways think on him, and he will direct thy steps: then shalt thou walk confidently in the way, and thy foot shall not stumble: for the Lord will be at thy side, and will keep thy foot, that thou be not taken" (Prov. 3: 5, 6, 23, 26). Oh, if David

and Solomon had acted according to their own beautiful advice, they would not have fallen so shamefully into sin!

Whence comes it that so many miserable falls occur in the world, and that sin, alas! is committed so frequently without scruple or shame, for some wretched thing, by people of all kinds, young and old, great and lowly, if not from the fact that they turn away their spiritual eyes from the grand central point, forgetting the great God, who is always present, and closely observing them? "God is not before his eyes" (Ibid. 9 : 5), that is, the eyes of the sinner. And what is the consequence? "His ways are filthy at all times." "His mouth is full of cursing," continues the Psalmist, "and of bitterness and of deceit" (Ibid. 7); his hands are full of injustice; his house is like a den of lions, in which he lies in wait for the innocent and poor, that he may oppress them, and all this, because "God is not before his eyes: For he hath said in his heart: God hath forgotten, he hath turned away his face not to see the end."

So it is, nowadays, with each and every sinner. When people have made up their minds to commit sin, they try to blot out the thought of the all-seeing God, they are afraid of hearing anything which might make them uneasy, and disturb their wicked projects. They act like the two elders who attacked the chaste Susanna with their impure proposal. "They perverted their own mind," says the Holy Scripture of them, "and turned away their eyes, that they might not look unto heaven, nor remember just judgments"(Dan. 13 : 9). What wonder is it, then, that God should withdraw his fatherly hand from such men, allow them to run into danger, and to fall into many sins and be lost forever?

On the other hand, the Lord, according to his promises, cannot deprive of his help the man who with child-like confidence always keeps his eyes fixed on him; nor can any one who has the least sense of decency left be so presumptuous and shameless as to dare to offend God at the very moment when he recollects his divine presence. Could a servant be so daring and insolent as to act the buffoon before the very face of his monarch, speak slightingly of

him, or draw his sword against him? Rebellious subjects may revolt against their lawful sovereign, and plot in secret against him, but where is the one who would dare penetrate into the royal chamber or cabinet, draw his sword, and assail his lawful king? Would not such a man be regarded as a madman? King Antigonus as he was once concealed in his tent, heard some of his ministers (who were standing before it), murmur against him; whereupon he put his head outside the tent, and said to them: "Go a little further off, lest the king should hear you!" And the conspirators were as much shocked and frightened as if they had been smitten with a thunderbolt. In olden times a soldier once ventured to approach Marius, the celebrated general, with the intention of killing him; but no sooner had the general turned and looked at him, when he became powerless, and unable to commit the intended murder. We read that Absalom, after having murdered his brother, was forbidden to appear in his father's presence; he "saw not the king's face" (2 Kings 14 : 24), which would doubtless have inspired him with fear and reverence. On returning to his father's house, the prodigal son wept bitterly, crying out: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," as it were, in thy very sight and hearing; "I am not worthy to be called thy son" (Ibid. 18 : 19).

II. Why have I spoken in such detail of these matters? That you may see all the clearer, the wickedness and presumption of the sinner who sins under the very eyes of his God. The man who witnesses my guilt is nothing to me; I have nothing to fear from him, except the pangs of shame,—but to remember God's presence, and yet to sin, is nothing else than to mock God in thought and action, saying boldly to him: "See, my God, although I know that thou art here, and seest me; although I know that this impure thought, this improper conversation, this shameful act, is very displeasing to thee; although I am aware that thou hast me completely in thy power, and canst punish me as thou pleasest, yet I will accomplish my wickedness under thy very eyes, and before thy

face. Thou shalt be my witness and helper in my sin; what thou hast promised or threatened is nothing to me; thou mayest be angry or not,it makes no difference; I will gratify my passions and enjoy the pleasures thou hast forbidden!" O what insolence, what presumption!

We do not consent to sin until we have first shut the eyes of the mind to the thought of the presence of God; each sin we commit is a proof that we have not a lively faith that God sees us. True,our conscience cries out: "God is looking at you!" but we close the ears of our mind, as it were, to its warning voice, when we wish to commit sin; we allow our thoughts to be distracted by things that flatter our sensuality, we drive God out of our hearts, and act like little children, who cover their eyes with their hands, and then think they are not seen. But, as the Apostle says: "Neither is there any creature invisible in his sight; but all things are naked and open to his eyes" (Heb. 4: 13).

In vain did our forefather Adam, after his fall, try to hide from the sight of God. He did not hide from God, but hid God from himself. In vain did Cain, after the murder of his brother, try to escape the sight of the Lord; in vain did Jonas fly before his face: "The eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most secret parts" (Ecclus. 23: 27, 28). Woe to you, O sinner! who now deliberately shut God out of your thoughts, and do not wish to remember his presence! A time will come when you will wish to forget him; but for all eternity you will have to think of him to your intolerable torment and misery in hell! How so? Can it be that the thought of God, which is now so sweet and agreeable to his servants, will, hereafter, be a part of the punishment of his enemies? Certainly; if a lost soul could forget God, he would be free from the worst of his torments; but not for a single moment will he cease to remember in the liveliest manner and to acknowledge what he has lost in God. He will be always saying to himself: This God I could have possessed if I had wished, and

had thought oftener of his presence during my life; but now I can have no part in him forever. "The wicked shall see, and shall be angry, he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away" (Ps. 111: 10).

Ah, Christians, attend in time to these truths. Keep yourselves constantly in God's presence. Wherever you go, whatever you do, let this thought be before your minds: "God is looking at me; God is with me." He is here in this room, in the street, in the garden, in this company; everywhere I am surrounded by Him. "Whatever I do," says St. Augustine to him: "Thou seest more clearly than I who do it; for all my actions are known to thee, who art present everywhere, as the perfect inspector of all thoughts, intentions, pleasures and actions." With these thoughts we must arm ourselves against all temptations, dangers, and occasions of sin; and, cry out to our temptors, as the chaste Susanna did, when she refused to commit sin under pressure of the elders' threats: "It is better for me to fall into your hands without doing this thing, than to sin in the sight of the Lord" (Dan. 13: 22). The great God is looking at me, he is present here. Away, then, with this temptation, with this filthy passion! it is better for me to restrain it, and to forfeit all the delights of the world, than to sin in the sight of the Lord!

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE MERCY OF GOD AND HIS PATIENCE WITH SINNERS.

"*Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.*"
Luke 6: 36.

What a good and merciful Lord is ours! Not satisfied with publicly manifesting his mercy towards sinners, by seeking them everywhere, and receiving them most lovingly into his friendship, Jesus Christ also shows us the mercy of his heavenly Father, in making his sun to

shine on the good and the wicked, and his rain to fall on the just and the unjust. In fact, since the latter are more in need of pity and mercy than the just, he makes them the special subjects of his patience and long-suffering goodness. Since what could not be done by the consideration of the uncertainty of life, the severity of God's judgments, and the eternal pains of hell, must and will eventually be effected by meditating on the merciful goodness of God, we shall now reflect to-day upon

I. The wonderful goodness and mercy of God towards the unrepentant sinner; and

II. The wonderful goodness and mercy of God towards the sinner who wishes to be converted.

I. There is nothing more pleasing to an angry man, than to be revenged upon his enemy. Rare is it to find men who, if they are grievously offended and have a chance of avenging themselves, yet manage to conquer their anger and to forgive their foe. To no purpose do preachers exhort people to forgive injuries; to no purpose, do they cry out till they are hoarse the words of our Lord, "But I say to you: Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you" (Matt. 5: 44). Pardon those who have offended you, or else God will never pardon your sins; forgive, and that too from your hearts, or the fire of hell awaits you; you must necessarily choose one or the other. Vain, I say, is it to exhort people to practise the duty of forgiveness; for, generally speaking, they will remain as they were before. When anger and hatred have once taken possession of the heart, all the exhortations in the world will not prevent a man from being revenged when he can, far less, speak lovingly of his enemy, or do him any good.

If, like men, God, too, were unwilling to restrain his hatred and anger; if he were determined to take revenge on his enemy every time he offends him: oh, woe to us! where should we be now? Not here certainly. Long ago, we should have been with the

demons in the flames of hell! How would it now be with many of you, O sinners? Let us consider a little both the past and the present. How have we acted towards God, and how has God acted towards us? What injury has he ever done us? Is there any one who can point to the least thing that God has done to harm him? Nay, is there any one who can prove that God has not been constantly doing good to him every moment of his life? In justice, therefore, there should not be a moment of our lives during which we do not behave towards God with the greatest gratitude, reverence, fear, and love. How have we treated him in reality? Have we not dared, miserable creatures that we are, who are every moment in need of our God, have we not dared to rebel against him without the least cause? How often have we not renounced his friendship, and declared war against him; reviled and insulted him to his face by our actions; despised, mocked, and laughed at him; trampled on what we knew to be the expression of his will, and turned our backs on him, thus showing him that we cared little about him? That is really what we have done every time we committed a mortal sin. That is what is still done every day by most men, by all kinds of injustice, by wilful drunkenness, impurity, cursing and swearing, calumny and detraction, in thought, word, and deed. For sin is nothing else than a rebellion against God, a contemning, dishonoring, insulting God. In sinning, a man refuses to do what God wishes him to do, or does that which he knows to be displeasing to God. How, up to the present, has our outraged God revenged himself? I might well say: "I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me?" (Ecclus. 5: 4.) In spite of having so wantonly offended God I have, as yet, felt no punishment.

Is this because the great Lord does not feel the insults his weak and miserable creatures offer him; just as a brave man does not mind the barking of a little lap-dog? Ah, indeed, he does feel them! He speaks himself, in the Sacred Scripture, of his great sorrow and anguish at the transgressing of his commands, of the disgust, hatred, and anger he feels towards the sinner. "To God the

wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike" (Wisd. 14: 9). St. Paul, when he says, "But according to thy hardness, and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath" (Rom. 2 : 5). To show the sorrow and grief he feels at sin, the Deity makes use of an expression which (strictly speaking), could be employed by men only: "And God, seeing that the wickedness of man was great on earth. . . touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, he said: I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth. . . for it repenteth me that I have made them" (Gen. 6 : 5, 6, 7), since they now despise and offend me.

What are we to conclude from this ? Why does God not at once pour out the vials of his wrath upon sinners ? Has he perhaps not sufficient opportunities, or means, or strength to revenge himself on his enemy? Is not the sinner at all times, and in every place, completely in God's power, so that he can do with him as he pleases ? He has only to give a sign, and the clouds will discharge their lightnings on the head of the presumptuous wretch who dares offend him; only a sign, and the earth will open and swallow him up. If God withdraws from him for a single instant his protecting hand, he will at once fall back into his original nothingness. If he is so enraged against sinners, why does he do none of those things ?

Ah, here we see the wonderful love, patience, and mercy with which God treats the sinner, inasmuch as he overcomes, so to speak, such an intense dislike, restrains such an infinite hatred and anger. He has no good to hope from the sinner, and no harm to fear from him, yet he does not take the least revenge, when it is so easy for him to take it. With the greatest patience, he bears with the wanton offences and transgressions of his creature, and allows himself to be insulted and outraged, year after year, by daily sins, and instead of doing the least thing to harm him, he preserves him in life all the time.

When God was forced to destroy the wicked world by the universal Deluge, it took him a hundred and twenty years to com-

plete his vengeance. During all that time, he gave notice to men of the impending calamity. He sent Noe to exhort them to amend their sinful lives, and to warn them of the coming punishment; to tell them that if they abstained from sin, they might appease the anger of God. When Noe saw that his exhortations were fruitless, he began to build the ark. But what a long time it took him by divine command to finish it! He spent fully a hundred years at it, although he might have finished it much quicker. Why was this? That men might have time to amend, and to do penance for their sins. God waited patiently; it seemed hard to him to destroy men, although they were his greatest enemies; just as a loving mother is unwilling to punish her dear child. And when at last the flood came, on the day appointed, how did it come? The waters could certainly have overwhelmed the world at once; but even in his wrath, God could not forget his mercy. The rain fell steadily for forty days, and the waters rose gradually, until they entered the houses and finally overtopped the mountains. Why was that? Because the patience of God was giving sinners time to climb higher and higher out of the reach of the waters, time to repent of their sins, and at all events to save their souls from the eternal flames of hell, as doubtless many succeeded in doing.

The good God treats you and me just the same, to-day. He is very quick in pardoning, and forgiving us, very slow in inflicting on us the punishment we so well deserve. He waits from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, nay, sometimes till old age creeps on us. He exhorts, threatens, promises, runs after us, and calls out to us to return to him. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; and why will you die?" (Ezech. 33 : 11.)

Behold that angry little infant in the arms of its mother! It kicks and struggles, and tries its best to get free from her embrace. It gnashes its teeth against its mother, yes, actually raises its hand to strike her, so angry is it in its weakness, at not getting what it wishes. And what does the mother do? Does she beat it? (Some-

times, indeed, that would be a very good thing to do ; but it is not generally done). Ah no ! she presses the infant all the closer to her bosom, she talks to it in a loving manner, sings for it and soothes it, until it is quite satisfied. That is the only punishment she inflicts on her obstinate child. There you have a striking example of the presumption of the sinner, and at the same time of the goodness and mercy of God towards him. Every reasonable man knows well that he is held in the arms, in the very lap of God, whose presence he can never avoid, and yet he dares to vent his anger against him, to revile him, to despise him, and, as it were, to raise his hand to strike him in the face, and this undutiful conduct he persists in often for years and years. Meanwhile, how does God act towards him? Who can count the benefits that God bestows every day on ungrateful sinners?

II. The wonderful goodness and mercy of God towards the sinner who wishes to be converted.

If a serf who has offended a mighty lord wishes to be re-admitted to his favor and friendship, what must he do? Must he at once run to his house, acknowledge his guilt, and beg pardon? Certainly not ; if he rushes into the house uninvited, although his only intention be to ask forgiveness, his conduct would be considered a fresh insult, would only inflame the other's anger anew, and perhaps make him receive the intruder at the point of the sword. At all events, the latter need not expect a kind reception. He must not be surprised if the offended nobleman turn his back on him, tell him in cold and scornful words to come another time, and at last consents to speak of forgiveness only when ample satisfaction has been offered for the insult. No ; a matter of this kind must be dealt with much more carefully. The offender must employ the good offices of a third person to act as his advocate, and say a good word for him. And the advocate, too, has to be on his guard ; it will not do for him to blurt out the matter at once ; he must wait for a favorable opportunity, when the other is in good

humor, he may say that his poor client is in great trouble on account of having incurred displeasure, that he is very sorry for his conduct, and is ready to do anything in his power by way of satisfaction. Even if these means are successful, and the reconciliation is effected,there still remains often a secret dislike and mistrust in the heart of the offended person. The insult suffered is rarely forgotten, and there is no chance of true friendship ever existing between the parties again.

Ah! how differently does the Almighty and Sovereign Lord treat us sinners! If I have made God my enemy; if I have grievously offended him a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand times; if I have wantonly insulted him for ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years; how much time will it take to appease his anger, and be reconciled to him? It would be but right and just that, as I have allowed him to knock, sigh, and call out so often at the door of my heart, and have turned him away like a troublesome beggar; it would be only right that he should, in turn, allow me to knock and sigh without giving me an answer. But no; a single moment is all the time I require to be reconciled to him. He himself has promised that, at whatever time the sinner is converted, he will live, and his former iniquities will no longer be remembered. But how am I to present myself before him? Oh,in dealing with an offended God, there is no need of a third person's interference to dispose the divine heart to forgiveness and mercy. If I only wish it, I can present myself directly before him, and ask his pardon. With what loving kindness did he not act towards the sinners Zachæus and Matthew, towards the woman taken in adultery, the Samaritan woman, the notorious sinner Magdalene, the penitent thief, Peter, who denied him thrice, and Thomas, who had lost faith in him! To none of these, did he make the least reproach on account of the grievous sins they had committed; he never upbraided them with their vices; he treated them with the greatest friendship, ate and drank with them publicly, and defended them against detractors as if he himself were attacked in their persons, so that

he got the name of being a protector, receiver, friend, and harborer of sinners.

If you wish to see what joy it gives the Almighty God to admit the repentant sinner to his friendship, read and meditate on the parable of the Good Shepherd, who leaves his whole flock to go in search of the one sheep that has gone astray ; read the parable of the Prodigal Son, who after having squandered his whole patrimony in gluttony, drunkenness, and riotous living, and disgraced his father, came back half naked and starving ; to be received by his glad father as if he were a great Lord,to be embraced and kissed with tears of joy, to be clad in new clothes,with a ring for his finger,and shoes for his feet, and a grand banquet prepared to testify to the joy the good father felt at the return of his worthless son. "Let us eat and make merry," he said, "because this my son was dead, and is come to life again ; was lost and is found" (Luke 23 : 24). "So I say to you," says Christ, "there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance" (Ibid. 10). God calls the Angels to rejoice, as it were, not with men, but with himself, when a sinner does penance ; as if man were the god of his God ; as if the whole happiness of God consists in finding the man whom he had lost,as if God could not be happy without man.

O sinner ! how long will you refuse to give this great consolation and joy to the God who loves you so much ? Have you not abused his patience long enough ? Can you be so cruel as to offend him still more, and to treat him so shamefully ? He is no Christian, but a heathen, an infidel,he is an unreasoning wild beast, a monster ; who is not touched by the wonderful patience and goodness of God ; who is not moved by it to repent of his sins at once, and who, instead of loving such a good Lord with all his heart, actually offends him anew !

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

HOW THE PROCRASTINATING SINNER INSULTS GOD.

"*And they began all at once to make excuse.*" Luke 14 : 18.

These must have been very ill-bred and discourteous people who so rudely declined a friendly invitation to a magnificent banquet. Enraged at their conduct, the one who invited them (as the parable shows us), excluded them forever from his table : "But I say unto you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper." Do not the majority of Catholics, act in the same way towards their Lord and God? He invites them to his first Supper, in which he gives us his own Flesh and Blood as our food and drink; and yet, how many there are who make excuses, and despise that precious Banquet, by going but seldom to holy Communion! He invites us to the heavenly Marriage-feast, that we may share with them forever in all imaginable and unimaginable delights; but how many excuse themselves and refuse to come, because they prefer to indulge in forbidden pleasures, and glut themselves with the husks of swine! Daily, he invites sinners, to his grace and friendship. He calls upon them to be converted and do penance, and promises that he will forgive them everything, so that they may not be excluded from his heavenly marriage-feast; but how many there are who make excuses, and reject the proffered grace by constantly deferring repentance and conversion to some indefinite time, saying always, by way of answer to their long-suffering Lord : I will come, but not now : later on; I will do penance and be converted, but not immediately; at some other time! In view of this insulting and injurious treatment of our best Friend, let us consider, to-day

I. The majesty and mercy of him who invites the sinner to repentance; and

II. The insult and injury offered to God by the procrastinating sinner.

I. If an equal, nay, if even an inferior who had offended and insulted you, were to come to you, and earnestly and humbly implore your pardon; would you refuse to listen to him? Would you turn your back on him, and shut the door in his face? If you did so, you would act in direct opposition to the Christian law. For Christ our Saviour most earnestly and emphatically commands us to return good for evil, not to seek revenge, but to treat our worst enemies with meekness, friendliness, and charity. He even declares that we must prevent our enmity in efforts at reconciliation: "If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee; leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother." You must at once make the advances in person: you must defer the offering of your gift to God, until you have reconciled yourself to your brother. How much more are you bound to lay aside your hatred and enmity against one whom you have grossly offended, and who now humbly begs to be restored to your friendship? But if a great lord or prince, who is not at all in need of you, who has little to gain from your friendship, and nothing to fear from your enmity, and on whose favor you depend for your very livelihood; if he, I say, after having been offended by you, should, through sheer goodness and piety, either in his own person, or by an authorized ambassador, offer you full pardon and forgiveness, begging you at the same time to accept his offer at once; would you obstinately turn your back on him, and say that it does not suit you now to regain his friendship, that you do not want it yet, and that he must come some other time?

O sinner, look at this matter in a reasonable light! Who is he who comes to you, who calls and invites you, wishing to be reconciled to you, to be your friend again? Is he your prince and sovereign? Oh, if he were, how you would bow and scrape

before him! You certainly would not remain seated in his presence if he came to you; you would not even wait his coming, but would run out to meet him, and, in every possible way, try to ingratiate yourself into his favor. Lo! the One who calls you is an infinitely greater Lord than any earthly prince; before him all the kings and emperors of the universe, as well as the poorest beggar and simplest peasant, must bend the knee, and humbly implore their daily bread. In a word, he is the infinitely great God himself, before whose Majesty the Angels in heaven, the devils in hell, and all creatures on and under the earth tremble with reverence. This great Lord and God deigns to speak to you, O sinner, O miserable worm of the earth! He offers you his favor, grace, and friendship, which you have forfeited forever, and you still hesitated to accept his offer? Is it not yet convenient for you to hearken to his invitation? Do you still say to him: "Go and come again, and to-morrow I will give to thee (Prov. 3 : 28), I do not wish to be your friend to-day !—?

What harm has he done you? Harm! What good things do you possess that this generous God has not freely given you? Are you not, from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot, a proof of his liberality and bounty? That you are, that you live, that you see, hear, feel, walk, stand, sit; for all that you have, you have every right to thank him most humbly and gratefully. Why then should you remain angry with him any longer? But what am I saying? Angry with him! It is God who has first been offended by you! He it is whose commands you have neglected, whose blood you have trampled under foot, whom you have time after time offended, insulted, despised, for such a miserable thing as your worthless vanity, for a breath of honor, for a wretched piece of money, for a brutal lust, for the sake of gratifying your anger and vindictiveness, or of indulging in gluttony and drunkenness, or for fear of displeasing, or for the sake of pleasing men through human respect: "He it is whom we have despised!" And he whom you have treated so insultingly, and who, therefore, has just cause to reject you, to cry out to you in

a far different voice, to send down fire from heaven on you, to smite you with his thunderbolts, and to call upon the demons of hell and all the creatures on earth to take vengeance on you at this very moment, he it is who calls you to repentance! He, the great God, who was first offended by you; who has been so often offended by you,—calls you! He is the first to make the advances, to invite you to return to him! And why? If you saw approaching you at a distance a man whom you have treated as shamefully as you have treated your God you would tremble with fear, and try to avoid him, and with reason, too, for you would have just cause to fear his vengeance. But do not fear, O sinner! Do not run away and hide yourself!

Your God, whom you have so often and so grievously offended, comes to you in mercy and in love; he comes to you, not to punish and condemn you as you deserve, but to invite you to return to his grace and friendship. This he does sweetly, humbly, even suppliantly, as if he were in need of your favor. He seeks you out in his own person; he begs of you to return to him by his servants, whom he has commissioned for that purpose, as St. Paul says: "For Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us. For Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5 : 20). What else is meant by all those good inspirations, those salutary thoughts? Why, O sinner! do you fear death and judgment? Why envy the calm conscience of the just, and long to enjoy peace of soul?

II. There is another thing, which is still more to be wondered at. To me, indeed, it would seem incredible, nay, impossible, if experience did not prove it to be true, that the man whom God seeks, invites, and implores to return to him, will not come at once, disdains the loving invitation, turns his back on God, and shuts the door in his face. Come some other time, he says to God, (as if he were speaking to a beggar): I have nothing for thee now! I well know, O God, what thou wishest me to do. Thou desirest me to abstain from sin; but it does not suit me to obey thee now. Some

other time, perhaps, I may do so,—after I have sinned a while longer. Thou wishest me to do penance and repent of my sins; but I will not do it now. Later on, I will see what I can do in that way. Thou offerest me pardon, grace and favor, fatherly love, and thy eternal kingdom of heaven; but I do not desire thy favors now; come some other time. O insolence! what words can I find to express thy malice! O patience of my God, who bears to be thus ill-treated by a lump of earth, and bears it in silence, thy goodness surpasses my understanding! O sinner, how can you so rudely turn away from your God? Do you not (and if you have a spark of decency left, you ought to consider this attentively) act with the greatest discourtesy towards your sovereign Lord? Do you not treat him as you would some worthless man, who has neither power nor authority, and who is dependent on your favor for the very means of livelihood? And yet it is for your own interest, and not for his, that you should at once be freed from the miserable state of sin, from the imminent danger of eternal damnation. Have you any reason for continuing to offend your Lord and your God? Is it right and just for you to do so? Will you still sing the same old tune: I will do penance, but not now, some other time. I will be converted, but not at once. I will abandon sin and amend my life, but not immediately? Do you, I ask again, do you intend to give no other answer to your merciful God when he calls you?

Then, if so, listen to what I am now going to say; and learn from it, how grossly unjust your conduct is. If you are determined to go on sinning, you either believe that God will forgive you later on, or you do not believe it. If you do not believe it, what madness it is for you, if you have now any prospect of escaping hell and going to heaven, not to be converted at once, since God now so generously offers to forgive you! What folly, to defer your repentance to a time when (as you have every reason to fear), the grace of conversion will be denied to you! If, however, you believe, as you pretend, and I know not on what grounds, that, in spite of your having offended him for such a long time, God

will yet pardon you, what an injustice it is, what unpardonable insolence, what diabolical malice on your part, to make the divine love and longanimity an occasion for further sin! Will you then continue to offend him who has borne with you so long and so patiently, who is so mercifully willing to receive you again into his friendship, and to make you eternally happy with himself in heaven?

Besides, is it not most unjust for you to rob God of the present, which alone you are certain of, and which you are bound by countless titles to devote to his service; only to put him off with the promise of a doubtful future? You say that you will serve God hereafter; but who has told you that you will be alive to-morrow? If you are not sure even of to-morrow, why do you mock God (to whom you are bound to devote every moment of your life)? Are you not simply trying to deceive the Almighty by the deceitful promise of those uncertain days, weeks, months, years to come which you may never be spared to see? Does not your conduct show that you have not an earnest desire of heaven? In fact, you are paying with ready money the devil, who should not have the least claim on you, while you put off to an indefinite period the payment of the debt you owe to God, to whom everything you have belongs.

Even if you were certain of the future, you still act most unjustly to God by intending to give him only the remnant of a vicious life. You will do penance, be converted, amend your life, and serve God; but not until you have satisfied to the full, your evil inclinations and sensual appetites. Your soul was consecrated in holy Baptism as the temple and dwelling-place of God, and you will allow him to enter it only after the devil has occupied it for many years, and defiled it with all sorts of abominations? Your whole life should be spent in praising and blessing God, and you give the best part of it to the devil, while God must be satisfied with the miserable remnant of your wretched, declining days, when you have neither desire, nor power, nor opportunity to sin any more? In that way you do not so much quit sin, as sin quits

you. Your sins have left you ; not you, your sins. Two people are sitting gambling at night by the light of a candle. Suddenly, the candle goes out and they are obliged to give up their game. Do they give it up because they do not care to play any longer ? Not at all ; but because they have no light. If they had another candle, they would play until morning. O sinner, amend your life ; cease offending God, you have insulted him long enough ! What is your answer ? Oh, I will amend by and by,when my appetites are sated, when my youth is passed, when old age comes on, when that person is dead or gone away from me, when the occasion is removed, when sickness comes on and death is at hand ; then I will give up sinning, and will be converted and serve God. That is to say : You will allow the torch of your life to be burnt out, and not amend your ways until you are on your death bed, when you will have neither power nor desire to sin any more. You will not begin to serve God until you are wearied and worn out in the service of the devil.

If Cain was cursed because he selected the worst of his fruits to offer as a sacrifice to God, what sort of a curse will you then deserve, O man, since you offer to God the worst part of your life ? What would you think of a man who, at his table, would offer a prince nothing but mouldy bread, rotten meat and decayed vegetables, which he would not give to his dog ? Ah, there are many men who treat God also (if I dare say it), worse than a dog! They eat the kernel themselves and give to God the shell. The young and tender flesh they keep to satisfy their own greed, while the old worthless bones are thrown to him ! The sweet wine of youth is poured out as a libation to the devil, whilst God must be satisfied with the sour dregs! There was not a moment in which God did not think of us and love us! The whole life of Jesus was spent for our salvation. All his thoughts, words, and actions, his Passion and death, were for our welfare ; and he has already prepared an eternal banquet of joys in heaven, as a reward for the small service we can render him here! And *we* ? O, if life here below, were eternal, in strict justice, we should spend every mo-

ment of it in loving God, nor could we even then make a sufficient return for the love he has shown us! And yet, though life is so short, and so uncertain that we are not sure of even a quarter of an hour, we are unwilling to spend any part of it in his service!

O sinners, do you not yet see how unjustly you act when you postpone your conversion and refuse to hearken to the pleading voice of God, inviting you to repentance? Fear and tremble, lest the divine goodness and mercy may soon be turned into stern vengeance! God has fixed a certain limit to all our works, as well as to his own inspirations and graces. Perhaps, he calls you today for the last time. Perhaps, he has determined (if you still continue to despise him after this exhortation), to deal with you as you deal with him. Hear the threat he utters by the Psalmist David: "They shall return at evening, and shall suffer hunger like dogs." You have treated me like a dog, (he will have reason to say): you have given me the very worst part of your lives, and have turned me away from your doors like a poor beggar. But the time will come when I too shall treat you like dogs; when the evening of life approaches, you shall be chained up like dogs; I shall hear your moans and howls and shrieks when the dread of death shall be upon you; and what can you expect from me *then?* My special grace and assistance to free you from the chains of sin? No, they are not for such as you! I will give you the same answer that you so often gave me: Go away (I will say), I do not wish to give you my grace now! I will behold you suffering the pangs of hunger in hell, like dogs, and I will rejoice thereat. "Because I called, and you refused; I stretched out my hand, and there was none that regarded; I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock" (Prov. 1: 24-26). Frequently, I offered you my grace, but you refused it; I offered you pardon of your sins, but you did not accept it; I proffered you my eternal kingdom, but you had no desire for it. Now I, whom you have so despised and ill-treated; I, who have before now wept over your miseries; I, who have shed my Blood for you; I, who have given my life for you; I, who have so often fruitlessly entreated and exhorted you,

"I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock," when the demons, to whom you are now giving your lives, will carry you, body and soul, into hell! I will laugh, when you are howling in exterior darkness; I will laugh, when you are burning in the lake of fire; I will laugh, when you are tortured with an insupportable stench; I will laugh, when you are calling upon death, that will not come to you for all eternity; I will laugh and will mock.

Let us defer penance no longer. Let us seek God now: "As much as the Lord is patient, let us be penitent for this same thing, and with many tears let us beg his pardon" (Judith 8 : 14).

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE DANGER OF DEFERRING REPENTANCE.

"*There shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance.*" Luke 15 : 10.

Last Sunday I showed the guilt and audacity of sinners who refuse to hear the calls of God, and defer their conversion. Now I ask: How is it with themselves? Do they despair of salvation? Have they given up all hopes of heaven? Put the question to them, and, doubtless, they will all answer: God forbid; we hope to save our souls, and to be happy in heaven. And on what do they ground their hopes? On repentance and the amendment of their lives? O sinners, if that be the case, then your hopes rest on the one sure foundation! Hear what he who seeks and receives sinners assures you of, and be consoled: "There shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance!" Yes, they answer, it is on that assurance I depend. Come, then, at once! Do penance; amend your lives; run to your Shepherd, who is stretching out his arms to you! Certainly, they say; but not yet; later on. Oh! then I see that the foundation of your

hopes is *future* penance? Let me tell you now, by way of paternal warning, that the procrastinating sinner's hope of salvation is

I. A false one; and

II. A treacherous and presumptuous one.

I. *I have still time enough; I am young and strong; I will repent by-and by, confess my sins, and serve God faithfully.*

Such is the cry of most sinners. You hear it from blasphemers and slanderers; from the impure, the unjust, the vindictive; from drunkards, and from all who are not earnestly resolved to give up their accustomed vices. But I say to all of them: *Now*, repent *now*, do penance. Are you sure of a year, a month, a day, nay, even of an hour? The God of truth says to you and to me, "Watch ye therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour" (Matt. 15 : 13). "Be you then also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come" (Luke 12 : 40). Whether you are old or young, weak or strong, sick or in good health, you know not whether you have a day or an hour of life still left.

The end of life should always be before the eyes of young and old; for our lives will not be demanded of us, as if they were an interest due at a fixed date. How then? Hear what St. Paul says: "Keep the good thing committed to thy trust" (2 Tim 1: 14); be careful of the deposit that God has entrusted to your keeping. There is a great difference between a deposit, and interest that has to be paid. The interest is due at a certain time, before which it cannot be demanded; whereas a deposit has no fixed time, the lawful owner can claim it whenever he pleases. This life is not an interest, but a deposit, so that there is not an hour in which one can be certain that it will not be demanded of him. The Lord of your life may this night give power to the demons to strangle you; or you may be suddenly struck dead this moment with a fit of apoplexy. If you were this evening to be pierced by a sword as

you walk through the streets, or to be killed by a chance shot, you would only be the victim of an accident that has already caused the death of many who, like you, foolishly deferred repentance. Do you not see, then, how false are your hopes of eternal happiness, when you stake them upon an uncertain future, which is not yours, and which may never be yours?

Suppose even that the indefinite future really arrives, how do you know that you will then be really converted and amend your life? You know what you have now determined to do; I now say to you, repent of and detest your sins, and quit them in future. No, you answer, not yet. And why not yet? Oh, it is too hard for me now; too difficult altogether to give up my love for that creature, to abstain from that pleasure, that bad habit. If it is too difficult now, what will it be afterwards, when you will have spent a long time in the indulgence of that foolish love, that sensual passion, that bad habit? Is it likely to be easier for you to abstain from it then, than now? If you will but use your common-sense in the matter, you will see that your difficulty will increase with habit. A long sickness is troublesome to the physician; the physician cutteth off a short sickness. That is to say, a long-continued sickness wearies out the physician; while he has no trouble in curing a slight one. The disease that is inveterate has eaten into the marrow of the sick man's bones; it might have been cured if the remedy had been taken in time; but there is no chance now; it would take a miracle to save him.

Apply this to the maladies of the soul. A man commits a mortal sin through natural weakness and frailty, or by being careless in a dangerous occasion, or because he is overcome by some violent temptation; he commits it two or three times, and even oftener. Alas! he is already in a dangerous and fatal illness. But what does it take to cure him of it? A single converting thought prompted by his uneasy conscience. "My God!" he says to himself: "What have I done?" A single good inspiration from God or from his holy guardian angel, reminds him that he has lost heaven, and deserved hell. Or, perhaps, hearing a sermon, his

conscience is touched; he begins to realize his wretched state. Any of these remedies may move him to earnest repentance and detestation of his sin, with a firm resolution never to commit it again; because his sin has not yet become inveterate, nor grown to a habit. But the habitual sinner, the unchaste man who has been for a long time wallowing in the filth of his unholy passions; the unjust man who has been steadily enriching himself by usurious and unlawful practices; the drunkard of long standing, accustomed to cursing and swearing; these and such as these, who have often confessed their sins, but not amended their lives, O, how troublesome and difficult they will find it to return to God by sincere repentance,—to give up forever their sensual pleasures and accustomed vices, to begin to live chastely, justly, soberly, and holily. God may give them an inspiration, their good angel may speak to their hearts, all the preachers in the world may exhort them, but it is all to no purpose. Their sin is inveterate. The disease has long been eating into their vitals. Remedies are of no avail; and if God does not, so to speak, work a miracle in their behalf, there is no hope for them.

Has the world ever seen a more experienced physician of souls than our Lord Jesus Christ? How many great sinners followed him,how many has he sought out himself; and he cured them all! The first word of warning he spoke, cured James and John of their ambitious desire to have the first places in his kingdom. The first call he gave Matthew,then a public sinner, cured him of injustice so effectually, that he left all he had, and followed Christ. The incredulous Thomas was cured by the first touch. A single look was enough to make Peter weep bitterly for having denied his master; and the first ray of light that Magdalene received, cured her of the vice of impurity. Yet Judas died impenitent and despairing. Whence the difference? The former were prompt to accept and utilize the grace of repentance; Judas,on the contrary, had indulged his avaricious desires too long, and his disease had become inveterate. Long before he betrayed his Master into the hands of his enemies for thirty pieces of silver, he was, "a

thief" (John 12: 6), and therefore, he murmured at the waste of the precious ointment which Magdalene poured over our Lord's head and feet. And what excellent opportunities he had of correcting that vice?

II. Treacherous and presumptuous, indeed, O sinner, are those hopes of salvation that are built on an uncertain future! Your soul is now dangerously ill. I ask you, as our Lord asked the infirm man: "Wilt thou be made whole?" (John 5: 6). You have a salutary remedy at hand in the Sacrament of Penance, and you have been often exhorted to make use of it, but your answer has always been: No, I do not want that remedy yet; it is too severe. There is still time enough. By-and-by, I will take the remedy, and be cured. But wait till that by-and-by comes, and you will find that it will then be too late; for it will be far more difficult for you to do penance then, than now. And even if, like Judas, you had then an inefficacious desire to do penance, the justice of God, wearied with waiting for you so long, will withhold from you the grace and the opportunity of repentance, of which you have made yourself unworthy. "Woe to them that are with child, and that give suck in those days," says our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 24: 19). Woe to those who are always full of inefficacious desires to do good works, and who never bring forth those desires into effect! Their good intentions will all come to naught at last. Job says of the habitual sinner: "His heart shall be as hard as a stone" (Job 41: 15). He may in the end try to make his confession; but it will be a cold and dead confession, without true supernatural sorrow, without a firm resolution of amendment, and his heart will remain as hard as a stone that nothing can soften.

If a Hebrew was sold as a slave, he should have his liberty at the end of six years; but if he was contented with his position, and did not wish to be set at liberty, he had to remain a slave all his life. Who would be so foolish as to choose slavery in preference to freedom? Do you know, O sinner, who is guilty of that

folly? *You* are, and so are all those who, being in the state of sin, could be converted to God by doing penance, and defer doing it. By mortal sin, you have sold yourself as a bond-slave to the devil. How long are you now bearing that galling yoke? The good God offers you to-day, as he has often done before, the grace to free yourself from this slavery, and to regain the glorious freedom of his children. He says to you, in the words of St. Paul: "Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation!" Return to me; do penance, and amend your life! But you go on refusing the proffered grace; you put off the Almighty to some future time, which will perhaps never come for you. You are satisfied with your slavery. You think and say, "I love my master;" I cannot give up that creature, and therefore, I do not desire freedom. Oh, woe to you! what will become of you? By divine permission, your master, the devil, will make you deaf to all good inspirations and exhortations. God will withdraw his special graces from you, so that you shall not be able to do penance; for repentance will then become so difficult for you, that, humanly speaking, it will be an impossibility for you to be sincerely converted to God. And, indeed, this is only a just punishment for abusing the patience of the Almighty. You do not wish to be free? He will say: Very well, then; remain in the slavery of the devil, and be his slave for all eternity!

I hear you say: This will not be *my* case. Many great sinners at all times have done just as I am doing, and they were sincerely converted at last, and gained eternal happiness. David was guilty of adultery and murder. He had the guilt of those sins on his soul for some years, before he thought of repentance, and he is now in heaven. Manasses was converted after having spent forty-five years in idolatry, sacrilege, murder, and tyranny. Magdalene was converted after having led, almost from her youth, a luxurious, scandalous, and sinful life, and became a saint. Matthew became an apostle after having been a usurer. Zacchaeus was received by our Lord, after having been a public and notorious sinner, guilty of many acts of injustice. There are countless

examples of a similar kind. Why should I have less to hope than they had from the infinite mercy of God? At some future time, I intend to imitate them and to save my soul. Miserable hope! have you so soon forgotten what I have said to you? All the sinners you mention repented at once, as soon as they were enlightened by the grace of God, and had their eyes opened to their wickedness. They did not, like you, defer repentance to an indefinite period. Even supposing that some great sinners like yourself were truly converted, and saved their souls after having deferred penance, what assurance have you that the same thing will happen to you?

Again: for one habitual sinner who is converted and saves his soul, there are hundreds who never repent sincerely and who are lost forever. Having rejected the lights that were given them, and neglected to avail themselves of the opportunities of grace, by a just judgment of God, they are deprived in the end of those lights and opportunities. A certain usurer was often tortured by remorse of conscience on account of his wicked and un-Christian mode of life. He was repeatedly exhorted by others to give it up, but he used always to say, like you: "Certainly, I will give it up, and do penance, for I am not so foolish as to lose my soul for the sake of temporal things. I will amend, but not now. By-and-by, some other time, I shall have a better opportunity. There is no danger yet." He fell sick; a zealous priest warned him of his state, and exhorted him to do penance and make restitution. Where was his "by-and-by" then? After remaining speechless for a long time, he at last cried out, in a loud voice: "O penance, where art thou? I cannot repent now, because, when I might have done so, I refused." And having said these words, he breathed his last.

What do you think of this? May not the penance that you intend to do "by-and-by," be frustrated in the same manner? What will it then avail you to indulge a presumptuous hope built on such a treacherous foundation, in a matter that concerns your eternal bliss, or eternal misery? Say to yourself: "I am now in the state

of sin, and if God were this moment to demand my life from me, I should certainly be lost forever. Now, in his goodness, he offers me his grace and invites me to do sincere penance, to amend my life, and to make sure of my eternal salvation. What may happen 'by-and-by' I know not, nor do I know whether there will be 'by-and-by' for me, or whether I shall then do penance, or not. I certainly do not wish to go to hell for all eternity. My grea desire is to be happy with God in heaven. I must not, I cannot, I will not wait any longer, but will at once make use of the means that Jesus Christ now offers me to regain entrance into the fold of his chosen sheep." "My sheep hear my voice," says the good Shepherd. But when do they hear it? At all times, as often as he calls? I hear him crying out: "*To-day*, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts." *To-day*, God is calling on me to be converted to him and to abandon my wicked life. Therefore, this very day I will hearken to him. I will repent of my sins, I will confess them candidly, and make a firm resolution never to commit them again. If you do this, you may have a sure and well-grounded hope that the Angels in heaven will rejoice over you, and that you shall hereafter rejoice with them for all eternity. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

VAIN IS THE LABOR OF THE ACTUAL SINNER.

"*We have labored all the night and have taken nothing.*" Luke 5: 5.

Fruitless labor is always painful; always a bitter disappointment. Such was the case with the disciples in to-day's Gospel. "Let down your nets for a draught," said our Lord to Simon. What is the use? answered the latter; "Master, we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing;" we are tired of it. How many there are in this world, who, like those disappointed fishermen,

labor long and take nothing! How many, like Martha, are "careful about many things." During their whole lives, they have busied themselves about temporal concerns, while they forgot the one important business, the one thing necessary. The last thing they thought of was their immortal souls and eternal happiness. Such people will have to say at the hour of death: "We have taken nothing." Others, too, there are who, according to their own idea, labor for the kingdom of heaven, and perform many good works, but to the neglect of the duties of their state of life. They, too, will have to cry out at last: "We have taken nothing." Again, there are numbers who try to do what God wishes them to do according to their state, but they have not a pure intention, they forget to labor for God. Ah, poor people that you are! when you go to rest at night, you may well cry out: "We have taken nothing!" Finally, I shall now speak of those who are specially represented by the fishermen in the Gospel of to-day and I say,

I. That he who labors "during the night," that is to say, while he is in the state of mortal sin, gains nothing by all the good works he performs, by all the trials he endures; and

II. That, since the state of sin is such an unhappy, miserable, and profitless one, he who is in that state should free himself from it as soon as possible by true penance, and constantly guard against relapsing into it.

I. The night, in a moral sense, typifies the state of sin. No comparison is more frequently used than this in Holy Scripture, or when speaking of sin and sinners. What is the life of a sinner, but a night, from which, as soon as sin is consented to, the sun of justice is withdrawn, even in the daytime, and the light of the soul, sanctifying grace, disappears? "Let us therefore," is the exhortation of St. Paul "cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13: 12, 13); the "night is past, and the day is at hand" (Ibid.). "For you were heretofore darkness;" he writes to his Ephesian converts, "but now light in

the Lord. Walk then as children of the light ; and have no fellow-ship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Ephes. 5 : 8-11). And just as during the intense darkness of the night, all things are hidden from the eyes of men, and thieves and robbers secretly ply their trade; so,in the spiritual night of sin,all your good works, no matter how excellent they may be in themselves,will be passed over unnoticed by God, and the infernal thieves of hell will conspire to rob you of their merit.

Is there, then, a night so dark that the eye of God cannot penetrate it, or that it can conceal anything from his sight ? No ! says David : "Darkness shall not be dark to thee, and night shall be light as the day"(Ps. 118: 12). If I were to hide myself in the bowels of the earth,or in the darkest corner of hell,even there thou art present,O my God; even there thy all-seeing eye would behold me ! "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit ? or whither shall I flee from thy face ? If I ascend up into heaven,thou art there; if I descend into hell,thou art there" (Ps. 118 : 7, 8). But God does not regard the good works of the sinner,since,on account of the state in which he is,they do not deserve to be looked on favorably by the Lord of holiness. God does not so much regard the work itself, as the disposition of him who performs it ; he does not value the gift, but rather the intention of the giver. This is exemplified in the case of the two brothers,Cain and Abel. Cain offered sacrifice to God, and Abel did the same ; but how differently their offerings were received ! "The Lord had respect to Abel and to his offerings," but to "Cain and his offerings he had no respect" (Gen. 4: 4, 5). Whence this difference ? Abel was just and innocent ; Cain was unjust and wicked; the one offered with a good, the other with a bad intention. Abel was not made pleasing by his gifts, but Abel himself made the gift pleasing in the sight of God. And on the other hand, God did not reject Cain on account of his gifts, but the gifts on account of Cain.

This is not to be wondered at, for men act on the same principle every day. Serve the daintiest food in a dirty dish,and we turn away from it in disgust. Why ? Is not the food good ? Yes:

but it should be served in cleaner fashion. No matter what your enemy does, he will never please you ; you put a bad construction on his best acts, and you cannot even bear to hear him well spoken of. But who can adequately describe the bitter hatred,the aversion and disgust, with which the God of all holiness looks upon the sinner ? True of himself,he is a God of infinite goodness and love, regarding with mercy even the meanest of his creatures. But the sinner alone he excludes from his love ; he cannot bear the sight of him. He pursues him with bitterest hatred,although in his infinite mercy he permits him to live, in the hope that he will repent.

Judge from its effects, the intensity of this hatred. Imagine a soul that has lived for a hundred years in the greatest innocence and sanctity. Let it consent but in thought to a single mortal sin, and in a moment, the God of infinite goodness, in spite of that soul's past and long-continued service, and of the painful death by which he so superabundantly atoned for that same sin, will forget all its former good works and all the treasures of merit it had accumulated. Hear what he says himself by the prophet Ezechiel: "But if the just man turn himself away from his justice, and do iniquity," what shall befall him ? "all his justices, which he had done, shall not be remembered" (Ezech. 18 : 24). Is not this a mark of bitter hatred and displeasure against the sinner ? To understand this still more clearly, descend in thought into the fiery prison of hell, and see there a soul condemned to burn in eternal flames, for having consented to a single sinful thought. Who has condemned that soul to such a punishment ! The God of infinite mercy and justice. Through all eternity, he will see that soul, which he created to his own image and redeemed by his precious Blood, tortured by demons. He will hear its howlings and lamentations without being in the least moved to pity. Consider now, whether one who is so hateful to God can do anything pleasing to him or can have any merit in his sight, whatever good works he performs. No; no matter what good is done, as long as it is done in "the night," that is, in the state of sin, it will

be of no value; and they who are in that state will ever have reason to say: "We have labored all the night,and have taken nothing."

But, in the face of the divine mercy, and of the long-suffering patience and bounteous goodness of God displayed in his dealings with the most hardened sinners, and even supposing that the person of the sinner were not so unspeakably hateful to him, yet the works of sinners, no matter how praiseworthy they may be in themselves, have not the least supernatural merit in the sight of God, because they are performed "in the night." Place on one side of you in the darkness of night a piece of precious gold, and on the other, a lump of clay; or put on one side, a beautiful statue, on the other, the image of a hideous demon, and tell me which of the two you prefer, which you consider the more beautiful. The eye alone, cannot distinguish either the value or the beauty of the different objects, because it is "night,"and everything seems black to you. How precious, how indescribably beautiful in the sight of God, are the good works of him who stands in the clear light of day, that is, in the state of sanctifying grace! What great treasures a just man amasses! A single sigh that he sends forth to God, a bit of bread, a drink of cold water that he gives to the poor, each step he takes, every movement of his hands, every blow of his hammer, every use that he makes of the different implements of his trade, nay every mouthful of food he takes, although he enjoys it, provided all this is done with a supernatural intention, for God's sake, how valuable is it not in the sight of God! No matter how trivial and worthless each of those actions is in itself, yet it merits an eternity of glory in heaven,which the just Judge will give him who performs it, if he dies in the state of grace. "Amen, I say to you," says our Lord himself, "Whosoever shall give to drink to one of those little ones a cup of cold water only in he name of the disciple, amen, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (Matt. 10: 42). Cast into one side of the balance all the heroic deeds of the greatest generals, kings and emperors, from the beginning of the world, and in the other scale, a single

"*Our Father*," said by some poor woman with proper devotion, or a five minutes' work that the ignorant ploughman offers to God, or the little trouble that the housemaid has in sweeping out a room; oh, how quickly will not the latter weigh down, in the sight of God, all the grandest deeds of the most illustrious men! You ask why? Because, great as those exploits are, they do not exceed the limits of nature, while the good works of the just man are supernatural, and, being united with the works of Jesus Christ, are pleasing to the God of infinite greatness, and deserve an eternity of happiness. O truly happy state of the just soul! what treasures and riches it can accumulate in a day, or hour, nay, at every moment! O ye poor laborers, and servants, and all ye to whom divine Providence has allotted either hard work, or trials and crosses, ah, see above all that you are in the state of grace, and do not forget the good intention! How rich you are! What an exceeding great reward is in store for that seemingly worthless labor of yours!

II. Miserable, indeed, is your soul, O sinner, since you labor in "the night!" All your undertakings are black, useless, and unprofitable! Suppose that to-day or yesterday you have committed a grievous sin in thought; say that you remain in that sin for the next six months without confession and without true sorrow for it, although you have the intention of confessing it hereafter. Suppose you commit no other sin during that time, living, in the main, a Christian life: you go to church and hear Mass devoutly; you observe the appointed fasts; you give alms to the poor; you labor and work according to your condition with a good intention, because God requires you to do so; you bear many a cross, difficulty, and contradiction with Christian patience, contentment, and resignation to the divine will; nay more, suppose you give all you have to the poor; that you practise every imaginable work of Christian charity! that you fast continually and scourge yourself daily even to blood, that you beat your breast with a stone, like St. Jerome, that you go through India and Japan like St.

Francis Xavier and convert millions of souls; that you bear with the greatest patience and meekness all kinds of persecutions, sickness, poverty, hunger, and the most fearful torments, like the martyrs of Christ. Having done all that, look back upon it in thought, and see what you have gained, what you have merited by it. Perhaps you will think that you have done wonders, and will say, like him who says in the Apocalypse, "I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothing," but whom St. John rebukes with the words: "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Apoc. 3 : 17). And St. Paul says: "If I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing"(1Cor.13: 2, 3). That is to say, without sanctifying grace all these gifts and good works are of no avail. By your good works, you have gained no more for heaven, than one who pays a large sum of money in a lottery, hoping to win something, and draws nothing but blanks. You have borne many trials and contradictions, but you are like a heavily-laden beast of burden, that is urged on during the day with blows, and, in the evening, is turned into a comfortless stable. You labor like the dumb animal. You bear your cross, you suffer hunger, and want, and misery, caused by yourselves or by others: but, whether you bear them patiently or not, you have no consolation from God, no merit for eternity; and at night, you retire to rest with your miserable soul crushed under the yoke of the devil. In a word, you have nothing left, but to sigh like the disciples: "We have labored all the night and have taken nothing!"

To labor and to gain nothing! The bare thought of it is enough to make me weep burning tears of pity! When I see a man working hard for his daily bread, or a beggar stretching out his hands for an alms, a sick man lying on a bed of suffering, a destitute man bewailing his misery, or an unfortunate man oppressed with crosses and trials; oh! (I think),if he is only in the

state of grace, he enjoys consolation from God, he has the peace of a good conscience, and he can expect a reward in heaven for all his sufferings. At least, he need only offer them to God with a pure intention, in order to gain the reward. But if he is laboring in "the night;" if he has lost sanctifying grace by one mortal sin, alas for his poor soul! All his labors and trouble are fruitless. "Write this man barren," I say of him, as God said of king Jechonias to the prophet Jeremias. But why? Jechonias had still eight sons living; how could he then be looked on as barren? God himself gives the reason: "For there shall not be a man of his seed that shall sit upon the throne of David, and have power any more in Juda." Therefore "write him barren." The same is true of the sinner. In spite of the superabundance of his good works, in spite of all his labor and trouble, he remains barren, because not one of his works will ever reach the throne of God. See from this in what a gloomy and horrible night sin encamps the human soul, by taking away from the holiest and most praiseworthy acts of virtue, and from otherwise most meritorious trials, all their beauty, worth, and reward. Moreover, such good works can never revive, so as to become meritorious.

The night of nature may hide from the eye the beauty and value of material objects, but, no matter how black the darkness, it cannot interfere with their essential value or splendor. It leaves everything unaltered, so that, when the day comes, objects are seen in their proper colors, the gold glitters as usual, beauty shows itself in its splendor as before. But it is far worse with the night of sin; for even after it is driven away, and sanctifying grace restored to the soul by penance, the good works performed in the state of sin remain just as black as before, without merit and without eternal reward.

There is in the Old Testament a striking figure of what occurs in the soul of a sinner. According to divine command, if a Hebrew were bought as a slave, his purchaser was bound to give him his freedom after seven years: "If thou buy a Hebrew servant,

six years shall he serve thee ; in the seventh, he shall go out free for nothing" (Exod. 21 : 2). And, besides that, if he had a wife and children when he became a slave, they too were to be freed with him at the appointed time, and he was to receive the same kind of clothing as that he originally had. But if he had married and had children during the first six years of his slavery, he, indeed, was to be freed in the seventh year, but his wife and children had to remain in slavery. Do you see what is meant by this figure? By Baptism man is endowed with the freedom of the children of God ; but when he commits mortal sin, he sells himself of his own accord as a slave to the devil. Now the good God has given him a means of freeing himself from this slavery ; not merely after six years, but in any year, at any moment that he wishes. As soon as he truly repents, he will be set at liberty. But how? What will he take back with him when he is restored to freedom? His children, that is to say, the good works he performed before he lost the state of grace, and which were brought by him into slavery, so that during that time he could receive no reward for them. When the sinner has truly repented, those works revive and are freed with him, clad in their former garment of sanctifying grace, like the children that the Hebrew slave had before losing his liberty. On the other hand, all the works performed in the state of sin remain behind. They do not revive ; they are, and must remain, without merit or hope of reward. The labor they entailed is profitless, because they were performed in slavery, in the night of sin ; and therefore it still remains true of such toilers, "We have labored all the night and have taken nothing."

What are we to infer from this? That there is no use in doing good when we are in the state of sin? "Oh!" one might say : "I have a mortal sin on my conscience, which I intend to repent of and confess hereafter. Meanwhile, I might as well give up praying, hearing Mass, and giving alms. If I cannot merit anything by those works of devotion, why should I trouble myself with them? I do not see the good of working to no purpose!" Your

argument, O sinner, is a very bad one. Since you cannot do any thing deserving of heaven, will you cease doing good altogether? For that very reason, you should be all the more diligent in doing good works. Suppose you have a piece of money that is broken into two parts, will you throw the pieces away? Not by any means! "But what are they good for? they are no longer current coin." True, but the pieces are still worth something; and if I bring them to a silversmith, he will give me a price for them. So it is (due proportion being observed), with the good works you perform in the night of sin. They are not indeed current coin with which you can purchase heaven; they are broken and destroyed; but still they are good for something. And for what? The good deeds of the sinner serve, then, first, to accustom one to good works. Why do soldiers in time of peace, when there is not an enemy near them, continually drill and practise military manœuvres? Why do hunters so often shoot at a target, when they are not actually following the game? Is not the labor fruitless in both cases? By no means; practice of that kind serves to make the soldier expert in war, and the hunter in the chase. In the same way the practice of good works will be of use to the sinner, although he is actually in the state of sin. His labor is fruitless for eternity, but it gives him a good habit, a certain expertness in doing the same virtuous actions afterwards, when he is reconciled with God, and when they will be really meritorious of eternal life.

In the second place, works of this kind dispose his soul to receive the grace of God, and avert the divine anger from him for a time, so that he is not, as he deserves, punished with a sudden death and condemned at once to eternal torments. Do you know what that Roman general did when, having lost a great number of his men, he was again attacked by the enemy? He made a rampart of the dead bodies, and thus enabled the remainder of his army to avoid a total defeat. So also should you act, O sinner! The good works that you perform in the state of sin are but the dead bodies of virtues; yet they can serve as a

rampart to shield you from the wrath of God, and to preserve you from a fresh attack of Satan, until you are enabled to vanquish him by true penance. And in virtue of this humble acknowledgment of his claims on you, God in his mercy will preserve you from further temptations and greater sins ; and finally, he will give you more powerful inspirations, illuminations, impulses, and better opportunities for conversion, so that you may recover his grace.

Be reasonable, therefore, and say to yourself: In the state in which I now am, I cannot merit heaven by any good works ; I must be mad and foolish, then, wilfully to bury my soul in this hideous darkness for the sake of a bad thought, a scandalous word, an impure look, a mere animal pleasure, that lasts but a moment. The spendthrift tradesman sells all the implements of his craft, so that he can no longer work at his trade to support himself. Do I not act far more foolishly when I commit sin ? Thereby, I lose all the spiritual treasures I have accumulated, and at the same time deprive myself of all means of meriting. I am now laboring during the night and to no purpose. I must, then, at once free myself from my sins, and regain the clear light of grace. I will sincerely repent of and confess my sins. I will not defer repentance any longer, nor wait till next Easter, nay, not even till this evening. For why should I hear Mass so often, why mortify myself so frequently by fasting, and bear with so many crosses and trials, and yet gain no reward by it all ? Since I can merit eternal glory in heaven every moment of this very day, will I neglect doing so, determined as I am some time or other to do penance? No, I will at once get rid of the heavy burden of my sins, and come forth out of this terrible darkness.

And when you have once freed yourself from your sins, rejoice with all your heart, thank God and make this irrevocable resolution: For the future I will guard against nothing so much as sin, which envelops the soul in a gloomy night. I will avoid the occasions that may lead me into it; I will not go near that house, that person, that company, which has hitherto been a proximate occa-

sion of sin to me. Let this, then, be your final resolution. Be faithful to it until death. Death rather than sin! Have pity on your own soul, do not sin against your own soul. If you have no reverence for the great God, who is present everywhere, who sees everything you do, and whom you insult and offend; if the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, which you trample underfoot, can make no impression on your heart; if you feel no compassion for your loving Saviour, whom you crucify again by every mortal sin, then at least have pity on your own soul, which you injure so grievously, so irretrievably and everlastingly by bringing it into the night of sin. Be faithful, then, to your resolution: *Death rather than sin.* Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE USELESSNESS OF PRAYER AND SACRIFICE WITHOUT RECONCILIATION.

"*Go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift.*" Matt. 5: 24.

If God rejects the offering made him by one who is not at peace with his neighbor, telling him in the words of Christ: "Go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift," how much less will God look with favor on the offering of one who is at enmity with him? We often come to the church to present our gifts to God. We offer him a gift of infinite value in the holy sacrifice of the Mass; we offer him the gift of our lips by fervent prayer, when we lay our wants before him in order to implore his help; but how are our hearts disposed meanwhile? Are we always at peace with our neighbor? Nay, have we really been reconciled to God by true penance and the amendment of our lives? If we do not make our peace with God, our prayers and offerings are not acceptable. For,

I. To pray and offer sacrifice and not to amend one's sinful ways is not a prayer that can move an angry God to mercy:

II. Such prayers and sacrifice only render the divine anger more bitter.

I. The qualities required by God for an efficacious prayer are humility, fervor, and confidence. God wishes us to pray to him, humbly acknowledging that he alone is the Lord of all, in whose hands are sickness or health, prosperity or adversity, our life and death; that it is he alone whom we have to thank for graces and blessings; he alone whom we have to fear and to adore as the Author of the temporal crosses and trials we have to bear. The brazen sky, which appears so merciless! the dried up earth, which becomes as hard as iron, cry out to us: Blame not our sterility, poor mortals! neither trust to your own skill or diligence. Rely solely on the all-ruling God, on whose fatherly Providence and all-wise decrees alone everything depends. Him alone you should seek; him alone you should keep as your friend. There is no Catholic who does not acknowledge that it is God who rules the wind and weather, the rain and sunshine, and who commands them according to his good will and pleasure. That it is God alone who can cause the fruits of the earth to spring up; but, since we are accustomed to receive those benefits every year, we do not appreciate those wonderful works of the almighty power as we should, and we take them as matters of course, so that we do not give ourselves much trouble to beg of him to bestow them on us. And if we pray, how do we pray, brethren? Is it not a shameless thing for a wretched mortal, who knows that he has grievously offended God, to dare to ask him for help in pressing necessities, without humbling himself and imploring pardon and remission of his sins, or to present to him a petition for relief, having at the same time the intention of continuing to offend him by enmities with his neighbor?

He who prays and does not intend to do penance or to amend his life cannot be in earnest, much less fervent in his prayer.

How can you expect God to hear you, when you refuse to hear him calling on you to return to him? How can your prayer come from the heart, when you merely move your lips and keep your heart obstinately closed? when your lips cry to heaven, but your heart remains hardened in wickedness? No, all your prostrations and genuflections, all your fasting and church-going, all your praying and singing, are only a sham. You are like a wolf; the wolf may roar, the wolf may tremble, but he still remains a wolf. Sinner, when danger threatens you, you begin to tremble and for a short time to keep a restraint on yourself; you go to church with every appearance of humility; you pray and sigh; but why? The shepherd has appeared and threatened you; an angry God menaces you with sickness or some other evil; but you may tremble and speak to him fair as much as you will; you are the same old wolf; you have no intention of giving up for good your wicked life; you are not in earnest with your sighing and praying; you have no desire to pardon your enemy, to abandon your revenge. And if we do not intend to quit our wicked ways, we cannot have that confidence without which our prayer is worth nothing. "Dearly beloved," says St. John, "if our hearts do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God: and whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of him; because we keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight" (John 3: 21, 22). David, after he had repented of his sins and was assured of pardon by Nathan, used to cry out to heaven with the greatest confidence when his enemies were persecuting him: "In thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded. Bow down thy ear to me, make haste to deliver me" (Ps. 30: 2, 3). The Prodigal in the Gospel, when he reflected on his miserable state, and was thereby brought to see his wickedness and bewail it, conceived a firm hope and confidence that he would not be turned away from his father's house, but would again be received into favor. "I will arise and will go to my father, and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee: I am not now worthy to be called thy son" (Luke 15: 18, 19). And they both had

reason to speak like that, for they repented of their sins and detested them. But if I am still in the state of sin, still unreconciled to my enemy, how can I say to God: In thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me not be confounded, nor abandon me in my present necessity? On what can I base my confidence? On the divine promises? Ah, my bad conscience at once suggests to me the words of the blind man in the Gospel: "Now we know that God doth not hear sinners" (John 9 : 31). On the divine goodness and mercy, because he is still my heavenly Father? But how do I dare to call him by the sweet name of Father? My bad conscience tells me, you are the sworn enemy of God! you are the object of his hatred and malediction! you do not belong to the number of his children, but to the children of the devil, who still holds you in bondage. The emperor Caracalla, wishing to have undisputed sway, murdered his own brother Geta in the very lap of his mother. Suppose now, that the murderer, with his hands reeking with the blood of his victim, were to present himself before his mother, who is still lamenting the loss of her child, and to beg a great favor from her, do you think he would be likely to receive it? No, nor do you even imagine that he would have the audacity to present a request at such a time. And yet, if I am in the state of sin, I should be guilty of still greater presumption, if, with my hands still reeking with the Blood of the Son of God, whom I crucify and murder anew by my sins of enmity and revenge, I were to present myself before the throne of God to beg relief in my necessities, knowing well as I do what the Lord says to all sinners: "When you stretch forth your hands, I will turn away my eyes from you; and when you multiply prayer, I will not hear; for your hands are full of blood" (Isai. 1: 15). Alas, while I am in such a state I dare not even raise my eyes to heaven. How, then, can I pray with confidence to God and ask his help and protection? How can I, with confidence, beg of God to do what I will, when I am not disposed to do what he wills me to do? No! Such prayer "is not a word that may draw down mercy, but rather that may stir up wrath, and enkindle indignation" (Judith

8 : 12). And so it is in reality ; for prayer without the intention of amendment,

II. Only renders the divine anger still more bitter.

Must, then, the sinner give up prayer altogether ? Is it not surely better to remain silent than to excite the anger of God ? No, such is not my meaning. He who is in sin should pray all the more humbly, frequently, and fervently. But, first of all, he should pray for the grace of repentance and conversion, and be reconciled to his enemy ; for, if he does not wish to do so, it would be far better for him humbly to submit to the divine chastisements, acknowledging that he has richly deserved them, than dare to try to avert those chastisements by his prayer. What do you think of a sick man, whom a skilful doctor has promised to cure, yet who cries and shrieks out at the top of his voice that he will have none of the medicines prescribed, actually repelling the doctor with hand and foot ? Is such conduct likely to win the doctor's esteem ? No ; in place of helping the sick man, he will be apt to go away in disgust and leave him to perish in his obstinacy. Would not any of us do the same, if we had to deal with such a case ?

Now, how do we act ? God, like a loving and well-meaning father, threatens us with the rod in his hand. "Will you amend your lives ?" he asks. "Will you avoid sin in future ?" And we answer sulkily : "No, we will not amend ; we shall continue our usual mode of life." "Then," says the Almighty, "you must feel the weight of my hand, which will force you to amend." Still we cry out and struggle against the punishment ; we reject the wholesome medicine ; we try to snatch the rod out of the hands of our heavenly father. Is it not as if we said to God : O God, thou wilt restore us to health by this salutary, though bitter medicine ; but away with thy medicine ; we want none of it ! Thou hast seized the rod, like a well-meaning father, to warn and exhort us to amend our sinful lives ; but we do not wish to amend; take thy rod away, we do not wish to be warned, nor exhorted,

nor chastised, nor forced to amend. We do not want to be brought to see our state ; we will remain as we are, in our pride and vanity, in our impurity and dissolute mode of life, in our idleness and intemperance, in our anger and enmities. Now, can such prayers move a fatherly heart to pity and mercy? Do they not excite still more the just anger of God, and compel him to inflict a more grievous chastisement on his obstinate children?

Let us, then, Christians, cease wondering and complaining if heaven seems hard and merciless to us. God is not wanting either in the power or in the will to help us : "The hand of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear" (Isai. 59 : 1). "Your iniquities have divided between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he should not hear" (Isai. 59 : 2), such is the answer your own conscience will give you, if you ask it why God takes the rod in his hand now. And it will tell you, too, not that God closes his ear to your prayers, but that he is a just and at the same time a merciful Father, even when he punishes you because you close your ears to his repeated invitations. Therefore we ourselves are to blame for any misfortune that happens us, because we turn the mildness of our Lord into bitterness, and compel him to be severe against his will.

I conclude with the words of my text : "If, therefore, thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift." Be at peace with your neighbor if you wish God to be at peace with you. Forgive, if you would be forgiven.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE NECESSITY OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

"*I have compassion on the multitude.*" Mark 8: 2.

Our Lord is so good and compassionate towards men, that he could not see those who wished to follow him suffering temporal want, without pitying them; so that he went beyond the bounds of nature, and wrought a miracle in order to feed his hungry followers. How much greater must not his pity be for the poor souls he sees continuing for years and years in the miserable state of sin? Yes, this is the sort of misery and poverty that moves God most deeply; so wonderful is the mercy of God to the sinner, that the means he has prescribed for him to obtain complete pardon is a most easy and advantageous one, namely, the Sacrament of Penance. Consider therefore, my brethren, that

The Sacrament of Penance is a necessary means of salvation to all who have sinned mortally after Baptism; and that he who has grievously sinned, ought to have recourse to this means at once.

I do not say that the Sacrament of Penance is of such an absolute necessity, that the sinner under no circumstances can obtain pardon unless he actually receives it. Even the Baptism of water is not necessary in that sense; inasmuch as he who has not the opportunity of receiving Baptism can be cleansed from sin, and save his soul by the efficacy of a perfect love of God, which is called the Baptism of desire. Yet the Baptism of water is called a necessary means of salvation in this sense, that he who has the opportunity of receiving it, and deliberately neglects to avail himself of it, cannot go to heaven. So with the Sacrament of Penance for those who have committed mortal sin after Baptism. If I have sinned grievously, an act of perfect contrition will certainly obtain

pardon for me from God; but there still remains the obligation for me to declare my sin in confession, when I have the opportunity of doing so, in order that I may receive sacramental absolution. For perfect contrition blots out sin, because it includes an earnest resolve to keep all the commandments, and consequently to go to confession when an opportunity occurs. If I have not that intention, no contrition can avail me to the pardon of my sins; and, dying without confession and sacramental absolution, in that case, I should be lost forever.

Confession is not a human invention, or a law prescribed by the Popes, as most heretics and opponents of our holy religion assert or pretend to believe. Regarding auricular confession as an insupportable burden, such men have made a point of crying it down, that they may be more at liberty to follow their evil inclinations and desires, since there is no doubt that the fear of the shame one feels in disclosing his secret vices is for many a great means of keeping them from sin. It is not a Pope, or an emperor, but God himself who has placed this restraint on sinful men. It is God who commanded sinners to declare their sins in confession ; and that command he has made so strict, that he has determined in the law of grace not to pardon mortal sin, unless to those who make use of this means, provided they have the opportunity of so doing. Therefore, neither Pope nor emperor can dispense any one, or even himself, from the obligation of confessing mortal sin. Jesus Christ promulgated this law to the world, when, after his Resurrection, he instituted the Sacrament of Penance in the words he said to his Apostles, and in their persons, to all validly-ordained priests: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20: 22, 23). From these words, it is evident that one must declare his sins to the priest; for how can I forgive or retain, if I know not what sins have been committed. It would be ridiculous for the minister of a king to receive full power from his sovereign to decide all disputes amongst his subjects, to condemn, to absolve, to punish, or to reward, if the sub-

jects were not bound to go to the minister and state their case to him. And it would have been just as ridiculous for power to have been given to priests to forgive or to retain the sins of men, unless men were bound to confess their sins to the priests. It is therefore in accordance with a divine, and not a human law, that we are bound to confess our sins. And in order to eliminate all erroneous ideas on this matter, the Church in the General Council of Trent has publicly proclaimed it as an article of faith: "If any one denies that sacramental confession is instituted, or that it is necessary to salvation according to the divine law, or says that it is a mere human invention, let him be anathema" (Sess. 14, Can.6).

And truly, if we consider the matter, we shall see that this law is a most just one. For what can be more just than that the sinner should confess that he has offended the divine majesty, and humbly ask for pardon? Do not imagine that confession is anything novel in divine worship. From the very beginning God exacted confession from the sinner, though not exactly in the same manner as he now does in the Sacrament of Penance, before he would remit his sin and receive him again to his friendship. Our first parents in Paradise were obliged to confess their sin. "The woman whom thou gavest me to be my companion," said Adam to God: "gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3: 12). Adam's confession being finished, Eve's turn had to come: "And the Lord God said to the woman: Why hast thou done this? And she answered: the serpent deceived me." How did he deceive you? What have you done? I have obeyed him; "I did eat" (Gen. 3: 13). The Almighty acts as if he knew nothing of the whole matter; and he examines them both until they confess the truth and declare what led them into sin. He acts, so to say, like a father who questions his child before punishing him, when the latter has committed a fault. Where have you been? he asks, raising the rod. What have you done? Will you not tell me at once? And yet the father may be well aware all the time of everything that has happened.

God acted in the same way with Cain, after the latter had slain

his brother Abel. "Where is thy brother Abel?" (Gen. 4 : 9.) Cain did not wish to confess, but tried to give an evasive answer: "I know not," he said ; "am I my brother's keeper?" (Ibid.) "Why art thou angry?" asked the Lord, "and why is thy countenance fallen?" (Ibid. 6.) But Cain remained silent. At last God asked him, "What hast thou done?" (Ibid. 10.) Dost thou still refuse to answer me? Then I will say what thou hast done : "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth to me from the earth" (Ibid.). See what thou hast done: and, "Now therefore cursed shalt thou be upon the earth. . . when thou shalt till it, it shall not yield to thee its fruit" (Ibid. 12). Why did not God curse Adam and Eve, as well as Cain? Because, he says, they confessed their sin ; but he cursed Cain for refusing to acknowledge himself guilty of having murdered his brother.

Yes, God has always required confession, as a necessary condition of pardon for sin, and consequently for those who have sinned grievously and who have the opportunity of confession, it is a necessary means of salvation. "Let no one," says St. Augustine, "tell me that it is enough for him to repent in his heart, that God, who forgives him, knows what he has done ; for if that were the case, in vain would the keys be given to the Church ; in vain, has Christ said to his Apostles : 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them ; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.' To act thus would be to make a mockery of the Gospel." Do you wish to know, O sinner, what you have to do? "Open your mouth to the priest ; for that alone is the gate of paradise." If you refuse to do that, or do it not honestly, there is no help for you ; if you have not the sincere intention of confessing your sins, everything else you do is useless as far as your salvation is concerned ; you will be lost forever.

It follows from all this that they are guilty of great presumption, and are in a most desperate state with regard to their eternal salvation, who, I do not say put off their confession and repentance to their death-bed, but who are in the habit of going to confession only once or twice a year, or who put off confession for

a long time after having committed mortal sin. Foolish people, what are you thinking of? If any here present are in that state, I now speak to each one of them in particular. It is certain that you must die, O sinner, and it deserves your serious consideration. It is uncertain *when* you will die, whether to-day, or to-morrow, or in a year's time. It is uncertain *how* you will die, whether after a long illness, or suddenly, and this latter is often the case. It is certain that, if you die in the state of mortal sin, you are lost forever. And yet you are not afraid to put off to an uncertain future, the use of the necessary means to your salvation?

Ah sinner! no matter who you are, I beg of you, for the sake of your eternal salvation, consider the state you are in, and how much depends on it. There are few Christians now in hell among the demons, who had not the same intention as you, of confessing their sins at some future time; but they did not do so. And they will all burn in the flames of hell, forever, because they did not confess and repent of their sins, when they could have done so. Therefore, say at once earnestly from your heart, I will not wait till old age, nor till Easter, nor till the next feast of the Blessed Virgin, nor till next Sunday; but this very day. "To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps. 94 : 8). To-day, the Lord calls me to repentance; now is the time to go to confession; and therefore, as soon as the sermon is over, I will try to remember my sins, and free myself from them by a good confession, that I may not be lost eternally. Such is now my firm resolution, which I am determined to carry out, and at once. Amen.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

CONFESSION AN EASY MEANS OF SALVATION.

"*Beware of false prophets.*" Matt. 7:15.

The devil is the father of lies. After ensnaring souls into sin by representing to them the sinful object in a pleasing light, when they wish to free themselves from it and the accompanying tortures of remorse, Satan strives to make them believe that it is most difficult, almost impossible for them to do penance and to make a good confession; so that sinners are frightened into deferring confession from day to day, and from month to month, and meanwhile they go on adding sin to sin, until their consciences become hardened in wickedness, and finally give up all idea of repentance. Ah sinners, do not believe the traitor! Go at once to confession, and acknowledge your sins with sorrow of heart. To-day, for the encouragement of sinners and to induce them to repent speedily, I am prepared to show that *Sacramental confession is an easy means for the sinner to regain God's favor*,

I. *Because of the effects*, and

II. *Because of the nature of this Sacrament.*

I. How (you ask) can confession be an easy means for the sinner? Easy indeed! Easy enough for pious souls, who go to confession every week, and have nothing to tell but half-voluntary distractions in prayer, slight fits of bad temper, carelessness in speech, a few idle words here and there, and similar imperfections. But for the sinner who has far more grievous matter to tell, whose sins are almost countless, who is buried in vice of all kinds, who has grown old in wickedness, and has to give an account of years of a vicious life, for him to kneel down and go over his sins one by one, according to their different natures, and as they were com-

mitted in thought, word, or deed: the very thought of it is enough to make one shiver. A more terrible rack could not be invented for any malefactor, than the confessional is in such circumstances for the sinner. True, if we consider the matter superficially, and as it is apt to appear at first sight, it may seem difficult; but think what a terrible burden it frees you from; how fearful the evil from which it releases you, and you will have to acknowledge that the difficulty is small indeed.

In what a dangerous state you are when in mortal sin! One who was a sinner like you, king David, hear him cry out to God "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak: heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled, and my soul is troubled exceedingly. Turn to me, O Lord, and deliver my soul: O save me, for thy mercy's sake. For there is no one in death that is mindful of thee; and who shall confess to thee in hell?" (Ps. 6 : 3, 6.) Here is a lamentable state indeed, yet it is the state in which you are; for you are suffering from an illness that, unless you are cured of it, will certainly bring you to eternal death. Do you understand what it is to be an enemy of the almighty God, to be separated from God, and to live under God's hatred and malediction? Such is your condition at present; you are a bond-slave of the cruel demons, who are eagerly awaiting a sign from their Creator to hurry you down to the abyss of hell. You have no more claim to the kingdom of heaven; all you are entitled to is eternal confusion, eternal hunger and thirst, eternal stench, and the eternal flames of hell. See now if there is anything too difficult for you to do, in order to be freed from such a dangerous illness, and (so to speak), from such an endless evil. It would certainly be but right that you, a miserable worm of the earth, who have dared to offend the infinite Majesty, should perform all those imaginable austerities during your whole life, in order to appease God's anger against you! Certainly, it would not be an excessive satisfaction, nay, it would not be enough to compensate for the insults you have offered God. And if you had to practise mortifications till the last day, you should still look on it as a

great favor to be thus enabled to escape the fire of hell, to free your soul from sin, and to regain God's grace and favor, and your forfeited right to eternal happiness. What is required to regain God's grace and escape hell? Nothing but to secretly confess your sins with true sorrow to one man. Remember, this, O sinners; no matter how often or how grievously you have offended God; all that he requires of you, in order to forgive you, is that you truly repent of your sins, and make a good confession. If you had offended a mere mortal like yourselves, could you offer him a smaller satisfaction than this?

Consider the example of the leper in the Gospel of St. Matthew. "Lord," he sighed, "if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean" (Matt. 8: 2). And what did our compassionate Lord do? "And Jesus, stretching forth his hand, touched him, saying: I will. Be thou made clean" (Ibid. 3). Hardly had he spoken these words, when the man's illness disappeared at once: "And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed" (Ibid.). If we had been present on that occasion, and had seen that sudden cure, what would we have thought of it? Would we not have cried out in astonishment: "A miracle, a miracle!" God works a similar miracle every day for the salvation of souls. Am I suffering from a spiritual leprosy, so that I am sick to death? Have I been in that woeful state for thirty, forty, or more years? God has prepared for me in the Sacrament of Penance a medicine that will cure me perfectly the first time I take it? The moment I confess my sins, and hear the words of absolution, the cure is completed; forthwith, my leprosy is cleansed. From being sick unto death, I am fully restored to health, as if nothing had ever been the matter with me. From being God's enemy, I have become his just and holy friend, and he assures me that he will never for all eternity remember my sins again. And shall I regard this means as too hard or too disagreeable?

In a dangerous illness of the body one has not always a doctor at hand. Often, he is sent for at the critical crisis two, three, four times, and is not found at home; frequently, he cannot come because he is engaged elsewhere; and when he does come, he pre-

scribes a costly medicine, that entails a great deal of expense; a long time is required to prepare it at the apothecary's. All these circumstances increase the difficulty of the cure. Much easier and quicker, O sinner, is your cure of a spiritual malady. All you have to do is to come and acknowledge your sins in confession, and you are cured. The medicine does not cost you a farthing; you get absolution for nothing; no more time is required than is necessary for the priest to pronounce the sacramental words; and nearly every where you go, you have all these opportunities at hand. Pitiful was the state of the paralytic man at the pool in Jerusalem. For thirty-eight years he had lain there, and no one, on account of the great crowd of sick people that thronged the place, had come to put him into the water. Therefore, he said to our Lord: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pond; for whilst I am coming, another goeth down before me" (John 5: 7). This pond was a figure of our Sacrament of Penance. Sinners, do you complain that you have no man to whom you can confess your sins? no man who can absolve you from them? In truth, if Christ had so willed, he could have given that power to no one but his vicar on earth, so that a long journey would be necessary in order to get forgiveness of our sins. But our Lord did not confine his mercy within such narrow limits. Every Catholic town throughout the world is full of approved priests, who can, and, if we go properly to work, will help us in this matter.

Sinner, do you still regard this means as too difficult? Then, if so, you do not know the misery of the state in which you are; you do not understand what it is to be saved from eternal flames; nor do you attach any importance to your salvation. But let us consider the matter more closely. In what does the imaginary great difficulty consist? I have proved that the Sacrament of Penance is easy as to its effects; for it frees the sinner from an immense evil quickly, surely, and easily, and the opportunity of receiving it is always at hand. I may add that the Sacrament of Penance is an easy means as well in regard to its own nature, as I shall now proceed to show.

II. All God asks of the sinner in the Sacrament of Penance is the *examination of conscience, a true sorrow for sin, a firm purpose of amendment, the confession of his sins, and the fulfilment of the penance enjoined him.* That is all. What terrible difficulty is there about it? The examination of conscience? What is easier than for me to remember what I have been doing for many years against God and his law? Perhaps the sorrow for past sin, or the purpose of amendment, is the difficulty? But these things are in the power of my own free will, with the help of God's grace, which is never wanting to me, if I earnestly desire it. If I am only sincere about changing my sinful life, there is nothing easier than to repent of and detest that by which I know I have offended so good a God, and deserved hell-fire. In the Old Law, if a sinner wished to obtain forgiveness, he had to excite a perfect sorrow through the motive of a perfect love of God; but now, in the Sacrament of Penance, God is satisfied with an imperfect sorrow, which requires far less trouble than the first, so that the Lord receives his rebellious children back again into his favor, even when they return to him through love of their own interest, that is, through fear of eternal punishment, or hope of an eternal reward. Is the difficulty perhaps in the performance of the penance enjoined? But how could that be? It is the practice of most confessors nowadays, and that, too, with good reason, to impose such slight penances, that, compared with the enormity of the sins confessed, they hardly deserve the name of penance.

So it seems, then, that the whole of the terrible difficulty consists in the confession of one's sins? Yes, this it is, which makes many a strong man shudder, fills him with fear and anguish, so that he can hardly articulate, while he trembles in every limb of his body, especially when he has very shameful or disgraceful sins to confess. This it is, that people fear, as if it were a burning furnace, through which they had to go to a painful death. But let us consider the matter reasonably, and we shall see that the cause of this anxiety is merely imaginary, and, therefore, that the difficulty is not a real one; at all events, that it is not half so ter-

rible as people think. For, when I am going to confession, even if I have the most horrible sins to tell, I myself am my own accuser. And who is he to whom I have to make my accusation? A man like myself. What sort of a sentence have I to expect? If I do my part all right, none but a favorable one, by which I shall be justified. Ought not this consideration console me and lessen the shame of my avowal?

If I had to listen to others making charges against me, and disclosing all my disgraceful actions to a judge in the presence of others; then, indeed, I should have cause to blush for shame; for my accusers might exaggerate my guilt through malice, hatred, envy, or vindictiveness. But as it is, I am my own accuser, and that, too, of my own free will, through love of God, and the desire of saving my soul. I am the only one to say a word against myself, and implicit confidence must be placed in what I say, nor shall I be under any necessity of appealing to any one else. There are no witnesses required, no counsellors; the whole affair is conducted between me and my judge, and the examination and sentence are profoundly secret.

Again, if God were to send an angel, or a seraph down from heaven, to hear my confession, in visible shape, then, indeed, I might have reason to feel anxious and afraid; because the angel not being a creature of flesh, nor subject like me to sin and passion, nor ever having experienced human weaknesses, allurements and temptations to sin, would have no pity for me. But the good God has appointed as my judge one who is in all respects like myself, who has the same nature, the same inclinations, miseries, weaknesses, and is exposed to the same temptations that assail me, who can sin as I do, and perhaps has committed more numerous and grievous sins than I have; so that he can and must have compassion on my frailty. Hence, St. Paul says, by way of consolation, to all sinners: "Every high-priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God . . . who can have compassion on them that are ignorant and that err: because he himself also is compassed with infirmity"

(Heb. 5 : 1, 2). Besides, (so each of you may say to himself) : I can choose whom I will among those who are empowered to act as my judge ; I can select one who does not know and has never seen me; I am not obliged to tell him my name; I can go to him early in the morning or late in the evening, so that he cannot see me; and, if I wish, I can cover my face.

To this judge, I must declare the sins I have committed, and that but once during my whole life; for when I have once confessed them properly, I shall never be obliged to confess them again. In addition to this, God has taken such great care of my good name, that he has bound this judge under pain of hell-fire to the strictest secrecy, so that in no imaginable circumstances, not even to save his life, nor to ensure the happiness and prosperity of the whole world, to save many thousand souls from eternal damnation, can that judge ever reveal to any one a single sin he hears from me, either by word or sign. Not only that, but he is not allowed to speak of it to myself, unless he has first asked and obtained my permission to speak with me, outside of confession, after he has given me absolution, of what I have told him. So that my sin is better hidden with him, than it is with myself ; for I might make it known to others, through talkativeness, or in confidence, or in order to humble myself, whilst my confessor dare not attempt such a thing. My conscience may often reproach me with the sins I have committed; my confessor can never do so. This is an undoubted fact, and there is neither law, nor dispensation, nor power in the whole world, which can ever free a confessor from this obligation of silence. How could God have made confession easier or more consoling?

Finally, he who is appointed by God as my judge holds the place of God, not to condemn, but to absolve me ; not to reject, but to receive me; and when I have finished my accusation, and am otherwise in the proper dispositions, the sentence that I have a right to is my justification, and it is passed in these words: "I absolve you;" I remit all the debt you have contracted with God; I loose the chains that bind you in the slavery of the devil; I open

the dungeon in which you are imprisoned, and allow you to go forth free; I blot out your name from the book of eternal death, and write it in the book of eternal life; you may now go in peace, you are innocent and holy, a beloved friend and child of God, and a lawful heir of the kingdom of heaven. All this is comprised in that short sentence: "I absolve you." Therefore, you must be convinced that the Sacrament of Penance is not, as some imagine, a hard and difficult, but rather an easy and most consoling way of escaping eternal damnation, and gaining the happiness of heaven.

Come sinners, I conclude, in the words of St. Paul to the Hebrews, "Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace; that we may obtain mercy, and find grace" (Heb. 4: 16); that is, let us approach the sacred tribunal of penance, and, without shame or fear, but with penitent hearts, confess our sins candidly. Do not complain that this voluntary confession is too hard for you. When the prophet Eliseus told Naaman to go and wash seven times in the Jordan, in order to be cured of his leprosy, the latter was dissatisfied with the remedy proposed to him. But his servants said to him: "Father, if the prophet had bid thee to do some great thing, surely thou wouldst have done it; how much rather what he now hath said to thee: Wash and thou shalt be clean?" (4 Kings 5 : 13.) Let you and me, O sinner, take those words to ourselves! If the Lord God had required of us to suffer the torments of hell till the last day, in order to obtain forgiveness of our sins, and to escape eternal fire, certainly we should submit to the condition with joy; much more, then, should we be ready to avail ourselves of the Sacrament of Penance, that easy means that he has prescribed for us, saying to us: Go, and confess your sins only once to the priest, and they will all be forgiven you?

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE EFFICACY OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

"*To dig I am not able, to beg I am ashamed. I know what I will do.*" Luke 16 : 3, 4.

The unjust steward of the Gospel represents the sinner who by mortal sin is guilty of unfaithfulness to God, and squanders all the precious treasures of his soul, so that he is reduced to the extremity of spiritual poverty, and can neither dig nor beg ; that is, he cannot do anything meritorious of eternal life, either by his prayers and good works, or by the trials and crosses entailed by his sins. "What shall I do," asks the sinner, "in order to make good the losses I have sustained ?" Go, like the steward of the parable, and call together your Master's debtors ; that is, recall to mind all the sins you have committed, acknowledge them penitently in the sacred tribunal, and thus you will learn by your own experience that in the Sacrament of Penance,

I. The sinner makes good all that he had lost by sin; and

II. That in the Sacrament of Penance, he becomes spiritually richer than ever he was in the state of innocence.

I. We should not deplore too much the loss of a thing that cannot be recovered or replaced Such sorrow is unavailing and useless. For instance, why should I give way to immoderate grief on account of the death of a dear friend? Can I bring back the departed, even if I wept tears of blood ? In such a case, prudence dictates that I should submit humbly to the decrees of Providence. In the same way, one might say to me, what is the use of my being sorry for my sins? Will all my contrition undo the evil? There they are, and there they must remain. True; if I were to weep the ocean full of tears, I could not get rid of the fact that I have sinned. For

all eternity, it must remain true that I have despised my Sovereign God, and grievously offended him. For all eternity, Adam must acknowledge that he has transgressed the divine command, and brought misery on all his descendants; for all eternity, Peter must acknowledge that he denied his Master most disgracefully three times; and Magdalene must confess that she was the greatest sinner of the place in which she lived. Yes, in so far, neither sorrow, nor resolution, nor confession, nor penance is of any good. But it is one thing to make a sin as if it never had been committed, and another, to make good the loss and damage caused by it. A woman cannot recall her deceased son or husband to life by weeping for him; but if thereby she is enabled to bear her sorrow and desolation better, or to make good the loss she has suffered, then, indeed, she would have every right to weep as much as she likes.

And that is what the sinner can effect by confessing his sins with proper sorrow. Thereby, he can recover what he has lost, and that as completely and quickly as if he had never sinned. Ah sinners, think of what a fearful loss you suffer, in that unhappy moment when you commit a mortal sin, even if it is only in thought; and then you will have some idea of the great benefit to be derived from the Sacrament of Penance! You have lost, as far as in you lies, for all eternity, the supreme and infinite Good, God himself, and his favor and friendship, the life of your immortal soul, all the infused supernatural virtues and ornaments of your soul. You have lost, and for all eternity, the merits you had heaped up during your life by your good works and by the trials you have endured; you have lost, and for all eternity, all right to the heavenly joys that were prepared for you ; you have lost, and for all eternity, the rest, repose, and peace of your conscience. From all this evil you can be freed, and can completely recover all you have lost, the very moment you make a good confession and receive sacramental absolution from the priest who sits in the sacred tribunal in the place of God.

1. First of all, God becomes again your loving friend. While you were in the unhappy state of sin, he not merely refused to rec-

ognize you, but even pursued you with the bitterest hatred, and looked on you with disgust. He loves you now as much, and is as favorable to you, as if you had preserved your baptismal innocence and had never done anything to offend him. "He will turn again," says the Lord, "and have mercy on us: he will put away our iniquities, and he will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea" (Mich. 7 : 19). A stone that is thrown into the depths of the sea is never seen again, so, when sins, no matter how grievous they are, are once washed away in the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, they are buried and sunk forever out of the sight of God, as if they had never been committed. Nay, as a proof of his having completely forgiven them, God will not allow them to remain any longer in his memory: "For, if the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed . . . living he shall live, and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done" (Ezech. 8 : 21, 22). But how can that be? Can the Almighty forget what he once has known, or can his knowledge be changed? There is one kind of forgetfulness, by which one is unable to recall what he knew before, and this cannot be in God, who of necessity must know all things from eternity to eternity by an unchangeable knowledge. There is another kind of forgetfulness by which one gives no outward sign of what he knows, and acts as if it were altogether unknown to him; and it is in this sense, that God is said to forget the sins of those who truly repent. As far as their guilt is concerned, they are no longer remembered against the sinner ; God shows him as much love and favor as if he had never been guilty of the least transgression; and if he who has been forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance should be so ungrateful as to fall again into the same mortal sins, those that he has got rid of by a good confession would never be held up against him, as far as their guilt is concerned; nay, if he is lost forever on account of the new sins he has committed, the former ones, for which he obtained forgiveness, would not be taken account of in his punishment. They are forgotten, and will remain so forever. And therefore, the sinner is just as high in the favor and friendship of

God, as if he had never committed a single mortal sin. What a consolation for me, and for all those who have sinned grievously!

2. In the second place, you were bearing about in your body, while in the state of sin, a soul that was disgusting and abominable in the sight of God, according to his words, "The soul that sinneth, the same shall die" (Ezech. 18 : 4). The beautiful life of sanctifying grace, is given back to you when you have received absolution in the Sacrament of Penance ; and you are again clothed with the precious garment, which compels God to love you, and which, if you die invested with it, secures the entrance of your soul into heaven. We have a figure of this in the Prodigal Son. When he returned to his father, full of repentance, and acknowledged his fault, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," the father cried out at once, full of joy, "Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet . . . let us eat and make merry, because this my son was dead, and is come to life again ; was lost and is found" (Luke 15 : 21, 24). By the ring on the hand and the shoes on the feet, we are to understand the other ornaments of the soul, that is, the different supernatural virtues that were infused in Baptism, which follow and wait, like courtiers, on sanctifying grace as on their queen. These, too, are all restored to the repentant soul in the Sacrament of Penance.

3. You must know, that all the merits of the good works you performed while in the state of grace are completely lost the moment you commit one mortal sin ; and while you are in the state of sin, they are of no more use to you than a defaced coin that has lost its value. So that, if you were to die in that unhappy state, you would not receive the least reward for all your good works, even if you had surpassed in holiness the Blessed Virgin herself. In the Sacrament of Penance, you can make good all those immense losses, and restore your former good works and merits to life again. After a valid confession, you are just as

rich in merits as you were before you committed a single mortal sin, and those merits will all be set down to your credit and to your eternal glory. This is in accordance with the general teaching of theologians, and is partly founded on the promise made by God to the prophet Joel. After the Lord had said: "Be converted to me with all your heart" (Joel 2 : 12), he adds: "And I will restore to you the years of which the locust and the bruchus, and the mildew, and the palmer-worm hath eaten" (Ibid. 25); that is, I will restore to those who do penance all the fruits they collected while in the state of grace before they sinned.

4. The Sacrament of Penance brings back to us our lost peace of mind and repose of conscience. Certain and infallible is the truth that the Holy Ghost has spoken: "A wicked heart shall be laden with sorrows" (Ecclus. 3 : 29). Nor can it be otherwise. An honest man who has got into debt and is pressed by his creditors on all sides, but has not the means of paying them, must be necessarily troubled by many painful and uneasy thoughts. Hardly does he dare to venture out into the street,lest he should meet one of his creditors. With good reason was it once said of a man who was deeply in debt: "I should like to see the pillow on which that man can sleep at night!"—meaning thereby, that it was impossible for such a one to enjoy his night's rest. But if some good fortune falls to his lot, if,for instance, he inherits a large sum that enables him to pay all his debts; what profound peace of heart he at once enjoys! what must be the thoughts of a malefactor in prison waiting for sentence of death to be passed on him? His thoughts by day, and, if he can sleep at all, his dreams by night, are all employed upon the tortures of a disgraceful death. If he hears the bolt undrawn on the door of his prison, a cold sweat breaks out all over him. Now (he thinks), they are coming to bring me to the gallows!

Sinner,before your good confession you were a debtor to the almighty God, who had you completely in his power. You owed him as many millions as you had committed sins; for when you

pray to the Lord, you say, "Forgive us our trespasses," or our debts. Nor had you a farthing in your possession to pay them. Your bad conscience was the importunate creditor, constantly crying in your ear, "Pay what thou owest!" How have you been able to find any rest while in such a state? You were suffering from an internal abscess,the pain of which must have taken away all pleasure from you, unless you were quite hardened.

Now, what is he to do who is in this miserable state, in order to regain the wished-for peace and repose? David, who had experience of it, tells us how he acted in his trouble and anguish! "I said, I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord" (Ps. 31 : 5). It is by the confession of our sins that we receive the writing sealed with the precious Blood of Jesus Christ,to prove that we have had all our debts remitted by the Almighty forever. By confession, we get rid of the foul sore of sin. By confession, our chains are broken, we are liberated from the slavery of the devil, and restored to the freedom of the beloved children of God. Hence, as a matter of course, when the cause of our fear, anxiety, and trouble has been removed, our minds must enjoy a great peace and contentment. I call as witnesses to the truth of this all those who have been great sinners,and who have freed themselves from their sins by a good confession. How did you feel when you came out of the confessional,and had performed the penance imposed on you? Must you not acknowledge, that it seemed as if a heavy mill-stone had been removed from your necks; and as if the heavens looked brighter than before? You went to sleep with hearts filled with joy and peace, and you got up in the morning with the sweet assurance that you were among the friends and children of God. It is evident, then, that true repose and happiness are only to be found in a good conscience. Sinners, try it but once, and learn what a happy and salutary thing it is to be freed from the burden of sin! Come, repent of and confess your sins, and it will be with you as with the Hebrews when they were freed from the slavery of Egypt: "He brought them out with silver and gold" (Ps. 104: 37). Silver

and gold taken from the Egyptians by the command of God ; so that they went away richer than when they came. So also, I repeat, not only does the sinner get back all he had lost in the Sacrament of Penance, but he becomes spiritually *richer than he ever was before.*

II. Are we, then, to sin boldly in order to become richer in graces and merits after confession ? By no means; that does not at all follow from what I have said. Sin brings with it neither grace nor merit. It is the canker-worm that gnaws away and kills all our merits. Nay, what is still worse, it renders valueless all the good works we perform in the state of sin. It is one thing to become richer by penance than one was before having sinned, and another to become richer than one would have been if he had never sinned. Therefore I say, by way of warning, to each and every one, "Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God" (Jerem. 2 : 9). Yet I say also, to the greater glory of the divine mercy and by way of encouragement to repenting sinners, that by penance and confession the sincere soul may regain all that it has lost and add a new gain to its former merits. How can this be done ?

1. Along with the graces he had before, the true penitent receives by the efficacy of the Sacrament, through the merits of Jesus Christ, a new degree of sanctifying grace which he never had before, and which strengthens him against future temptations, and prevents him from falling again into sin. You see, therefore, that he has already gained by the Sacrament of Penance something he never had before. But perhaps you will think that is not much. Oh, I answer, in the words of our dear Lord to the Samaritan woman, "If thou didst know the gift of God" (John 4 : 10). Sanctifying grace is such a great and precious treasure, that the least degree of it is far more valuable than all the riches of the earth, because they are but natural, whilst sanctifying grace is supernatural, and is a participation of the divine nature.

2. The second advantage to be derived from the Sacrament of

Penance is, that the sinner who has been guilty of grievous transgressions, when he has once been converted, and has repented of and confessed his sins, is, generally speaking, more on his guard in future and is more humble and earnest in the divine service, than he was before, and has a greater love of God than when he was innocent. This is what our Lord meant by those words: "I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance" (Luke 15 : 7). Has God then more pleasure in a penitent soul than in an innocent one?—than in ninety-nine just souls that have never offended him? The state of innocence is in itself a more perfect and happy state, and is more pleasing to God; yet the penitent sinner is in so far more pleasing to God, because, generally speaking, penitents become more cautious, humble, and fervent. Never did Magdalene love Christ more tenderly, than when she repented of and confessed her manifold sins. Never was Peter more humble and fervent in procuring the glory of his divine master, than after he had denied him, and bewailed his denial with bitter tears.

3. As a consequence of this, since God loves more tenderly those who are more inflamed with love for him, it is generally the case that, as the repentant sinner becomes more humble and zealous in the divine service, so he also receives more graces, favors, and benefits from God, than many others who never offended him grievously and do not serve him with so much zeal. The parable of the Prodigal furnishes us with a figure of this. On the return of his undutiful son, the father prepared a splendid banquet to welcome him, a thing he had never done for his elder son, who having always been obedient to him, complained bitterly of the seeming injustice: "Behold, for so many years do I serve thee, and I have never transgressed thy commandment, and yet thou hast never given me a kid to make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son is come, who hath devoured his substance with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf" (Luke 15 :

29, 30). Magdalene, formerly a public sinner, was the first among the holy women ; Peter, who had denied his Master three times, was the first among the Apostles to be honored by a visit from the Risen Lord; Paul became a great and wonderful saint, after having persecuted the Church.

What a good and merciful God we have to deal with ! If a criminal who is already under the gallows thinks it the greatest happiness to hear that his life is spared, how would he not exult with joy if he learned, moreover, that he was to be raised to a throne? But a far greater happiness is given to us by the Sacrament of Penance; for not only are our lives spared, that we had forfeited eternally; not only do we get back all we had lost ; but, besides, we become, by sanctifying grace, children of God, and heirs to an eternal kingdom ; nay, we are higher in the favor of our Lord than we were before. Is it possible, then, that there can be sinners who are afraid of confession ? Who can prefer to wallow like a beast in the filth of sin, rather than sit on a throne of honor for all eternity? To die an unhappy death and go to hell, rather than gain endless treasures and riches by such an easy and efficacious means ? How long will you, then, continue to rob your God of the joy he would have in your conversion, and yourselves of such a great good? "For Christ we beseech you," I say to you in the words of St. Paul, "be reconciled to God" (2Cor. 5: 20). Delay no longer, but taste at once and see how sweet and merciful the Lord is to his friends.

And you, converted sinners, who have already, by a good confession, laid aside the heavy burden of your sins, but are sometimes oppressed and filled with anxiety at the recollection of your former crimes; be consoled, be of good courage and rejoice in the Lord! "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him," such is the assurance the good God himself gives you, "in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness" (Ezech. 33 : 12). No ; you are now beloved and prized by God, and, if you wish, you may be even more loved and prized than if you had never sinned. Let us all, then, come to this conclusion: to serve hence-

forth the good God, who, as we must acknowledge, has been so merciful to us, with more care, humility and zeal, and to love him above all things, constantly, perseveringly. Amen.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE CHOICE OF A GOOD CONFESSOR.

"*If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace.*" Luke 19 : 42.

The unhappy state of the perverse Jerusalem drew tears from the eyes of our compassionate Lord Jesus, as he spoke these words. Sinful Christian, "if thou also hadst known!" So the same merciful God often speaks to your heart; if you only knew the unhappy state in which you are, and the graces that are now offered you. I have prepared for you, in the Sacrament of Penance, a necessary, easy, and advantageous means, by which you can save your soul. Woe to you, if you disregard that means, or too long defer its use! The time will come when your enemies will surround you in your death-struggle, and will carry off your despairing soul into the abyss of hell, because you have allowed the time of grace to pass by. Is it not deplorable that, although we can free ourselves from the miserable state of sin at any moment, there are yet so many who do not wish to be converted? Numbers of Catholics approach the sacred tribunal of Penance, yet do not receive that Sacrament validly, either through want of preparation or through choice of a careless confessor. To-day, I will speak of the latter point, being prepared to show:

I. That the true penitent will make choice of a good confessor; and

II. That the unrepentant sinner will choose an ignorant or incapable confessor.

I. Are not all confessors then, the same (you ask), as far as their

office is concerned? They all have ears to hear my sins. They have a tongue to give me absolution, and to impose a salutary penance on me. They have all received power from God in their ordination to free me from my sins. That is all very true, but, let us suppose you have on hand an important lawsuit, involving a large sum of money—do you not look out for a clever lawyer to defend your cause? Or if your wife, your husband, or your only child is threatened with a serious illness, do you not search for an experienced doctor to attend the sick person? But is not one lawyer as good as another, one doctor as good as another, at least as far as their profession is concerned? Yes, you say, that is true; but still there is a difference. I wish to get the best doctor or lawyer I can for my money, that I may be all the more certain of gaining my case, or of having him or her, who is so dear to me, restored to health. And you are quite right. Generally speaking, people are so careful in affairs of this kind, that rich men are sometimes not satisfied with the doctor who usually attends them, but call in, at great expense to themselves, the services of some physician world-famous for skill and experience.

If we are thus careful in things that concern our mortal bodies and our temporal and transitory goods, should we be less so in a matter on which the welfare of our immortal souls and our eternity depend? Your confessor is the lawyer to whom you must entrust your case, or rather he is the judge in the place of God, who has to decide it; and this is the first and chief office of the confessor. He is the physician who has to heal the maladies of your soul, and to preserve you from them in future, prescribing salutary medicines to that effect; and this is the second part of the confessor's duty. In order to fulfil this twofold obligation properly, what great knowledge and prudence, experience and piety, are required.

1. In the first place, he must have the necessary knowledge, so as to be able to pronounce judgment on all sins, and to distinguish their different natures and malice. He must know, in the matter of injustice, whether, to whom, and in what degree his

penitent has to make restitution for stolen or unjustly retained goods, for injury done his neighbor's property or character. He must know how to act with those who have been addicted to a certain vice for a long time, or who are still in the proximate occasion of sin. He must also be able to decide whether, when, and how he has to give or refuse absolution. He must know nearly all the sins that are wont to be committed in different states of life; must know how to deal with the ignorant and simple-minded in things that are necessary to salvation and to the reception of the Sacraments, that he may give them the required instruction about absolution, and dispose them to real, supernatural sorrow for their sins. He must know how, according to the sins that have been committed and the circumstances of the person, to give good advice and to suggest means for the amendment of his penitent, and many other things of the kind. Certainly, no ordinary degree of knowledge is required for this; and if one has it not, or has forgotten it, how can he be a good confessor, that is, a good judge, teacher, and physician of souls? Be on your guard, says the philosopher, against those physicians who, having but a little learning, kill many; who spend their time in visiting, and know how to pay compliments, but know little of their profession, and are good for nothing but to hurry off the sick man somewhat sooner to the grave. Such is the warning that St. Augustine gives to all Christians. "He who wishes to confess his sins," he says, "must seek out a priest who knows how to bind and loose, or else they will both fall into the ditch."

2. In the second place, a confessor must have great prudence, so as to unite mildness and affability with a holy zeal and earnestness.

3. Thirdly, just as one does not like to entrust a serious illness to a physician who has had little experience, no matter how well he has made his studies, so also, in addition to learning and

prudence, the confessor must have great experience in hearing confessions.

4. Finally and principally, he must lead a holy life, so as to do his duty as he ought in the sight of God, and not allow himself to be blinded by human respect or fear in dealing with his penitent. "If a man is bad to himself, to whom will he be good?" He who does not care for his own soul and its salvation will not take much interest in the souls of others. He who is unfaithful to God in other matters of his duty will not trouble his conscience much about how he perfoms his duty in the confessional.

In the other Sacraments it matters little to the recipient what sort of priest administers them to him. Whether he be learned or ignorant, pious or wicked, as long as he has the necessary power, uses the necessary outward signs, and has the necessary intention when uttering the words of the form,—holy and valid is Baptism; holy and valid, the sacrifice of the Mass; holy and valid, Confirmation and Extreme Unction. The sins of the minister cannot hurt him who is baptized, confirmed, anointed, or who hears the holy Mass. But it is quite different with the Sacrament of Penance, in which the confessor must act the part of a learned judge and of a skilled physician. If he be wanting in the necessary knowledge, prudence, virtue, and piety, then, indeed, the unfortunate souls of his penitents have a bad lawyer to plead their cause, and a bad physician to attend to their diseases. "As star differs from star in brightness," says St. Augustine, "so does one priest differ from another," as far as the performance of his duty is concerned.

II. Yet, there are Christians who, when they have sinned, not only do not make the least attempt to choose a good confessor, but actually seek out on purpose the most ignorant and incapable one they can find. If they hear of one who has the name of being exact in his duty, and careful in looking after the consciences of his penitents, they shun him. If, by chance, they happen on

one who exhorts or reproves them, they do not go to him a second time. They run from one church and from one confessional to the other, seeking some one who will speak soft and soothing words to them, according to their own ideas, who will look on the malice of their sins as mere weaknesses, who will excuse their faults, and consider their un-Christian customs as harmless, and approve of them, so that they may continue in them unhindered by remorse of conscience. In a word, they want one who will touch the wounds of the soul so gently as to leave them unhealed. They resemble those whom God by the prophet Isaias has called: "Children, that will not hear the law of God. Who say to the seers: see not; and to them that behold: behold not for us those things that are right; speak unto us pleasant things, see errors for us" (Isai. 30 : 9, 10). That is, allow us to go wrong and to be deceived; make the road to heaven broader for us than it is in reality. Like the sick man who says to the doctor: "Give me an agreeable medicine, whether it is good for my health or not; prescribe sugar for me, even if it is the worst poison I could take; allow me to drink good wine, although it will only increase my fever; do you only approve of what I do, and then, in God's name, let me die!"—these penitents show that they have not the least desire for instruction, amendment, or sincere conversion. Blind and unhappy people, who do not wish to have a guard to lead them on the way to salvation! Still more blind and unhappy those who have a blind guide, for they will both fall into the ditch!

Alas! some say, must I disclose my sins to a pious, learned, and experienced priest? I have so many fearful things to tell. What would the good man think of me? What will he think? He will think, with St. Augustine, in the humility of his pious heart: "There is no sin which another has committed too great for me to commit, unless a special grace of God preserves me from it." His piety will make him more compassionate of your misery, more gentle and charitable in his efforts to save you from the unhappy state of sin. The Saints are severe only towards them-

selves, while they are full of goodness towards others. They imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, who received sinners with the greatest love. The more pious your confessor is, the more he will esteem you if you tell your sins honestly; and the more grievous and horrible your sins, the more he will rejoice, not, indeed, that you have been so wicked, but because your candor affords him the opportunity of rescuing your soul from the clutches of the devil. He will rejoice like the hunter who kills a large head of game, or the fisherman who lands a large fish. Ah! but he will be horrified, you think. Horrified? The more experienced the confessor is, the less will he be horrified. Is a doctor who has spent a long time in a hospital, or who has served during a war, horrified when he sees a deep wound? Not at all; he has seen so many of them that he is quite accustomed to the sight; it does not inspire him with disgust, so that he attends to his patient without the least repugnance. Do you think that it is a new or alarming thing for an experienced confessor to hear grievous and horrible sins? On the other hand, by a candid confession, you take away from him all fear and dread, for you make him sure that you are disposed for absolution. The greatest, nay the only, trouble of a conscientious confessor is his anxiety as to whether his penitent is well disposed or not; whether he has a true sorrow for sin and a firm purpose of amendment. Well satisfied is he, when his penitent discloses candidly, but with a sorrowful heart, even the most terrible sins, and thus shows that he really wishes to be helped!

Finally, you say: "I am afraid to go to a learned confessor, lest he should probe the very depths of my heart, and bring even the secret details of my wickedness to light. Certainly, he will do that, if he sees that you are not open with him, either through shame, or through ignorance. It is, in fact, his duty to do it, and you ought to be glad of it, if you are in earnest about turning to God with all your heart! Yes; but he will make a sin of many a thing; he will forbid this or that custom, place all sorts of obligations on me, and will insist on my doing, omitting, avoiding, or restoring a host of things that will give me a great deal of

trouble. Quite right, again! He will do all that if necessary; and he must do it, if he does not wish to lose his own soul along with yours. The confessor's duty is not to try to please you, or to win your affection, but solely to save your soul from hell, and to bring it to eternal happiness; and thus do you the greatest kindness that one man can do another. There is no doubt, it would be far easier for him to hold his tongue, to let you have your own way, to absolve you from all your obligations, and thus to win your esteem. What pleasure or profit can it be to him to place restrictions on you, to reprove you, and to make you uneasy by reminding you of your obligations? He certainly would never think of doing such things, if his conscience and the nature of the case did not oblige him to do them.

Hence, if you wish to lighten your confessor's burden, you must tell him candidly how the matter stands with you, and what are your doubts. "See, Father," you should say to him, "I appear before you as before Jesus Christ, my Judge. I have done so-and-so. I have followed this or that custom; some say it is not lawful, and therefore I am disturbed about it; what do you think of it? What have I to do in the future? I beg of you, for God's sake (to whom I wish from my heart to be converted), to tell me the truth plainly. Do not flatter me. Remind me of my duty; I take your soul as a pledge of the safety of mine in this business." In that way you would show that you are a true penitent and that you are earnestly resolved to be converted and to save your soul. "There is no fear of my doing that," some one will say; "I know very well that, if I were to speak in that style, I should have to give up certain customs of mine, break off that intimacy, send away that person, restore those ill-gotten goods,and avoid the occasion of sin. But I cannot do that, and therefore I will go to that other confessor; he is a good, easy man, who will not trouble me with questions and exhortations, and will give me absolution!" Aha! so we have found you out at last! We have at length got to the bottom of the matter.

Sinners, if you are of this unrepentant mind, do not, I beg of

you, go to any confessor at all. Do not confess your sins, even at Easter; and (if you continue unrepentant to the end), not even on your death-bed. It is better for you to go to hell as you are. Such confessions would only bury you deeper in hell, weighing you down with their sacrilegious guilt. But if you are seriously resolved on doing penance, then I say to you in the words of Tobias to his son, when he was sending him into a distant country: "Go now, and seek out some faithful man to go with thee" (Tob. 5: 4). O sinner, you have wandered far from the path that leads to heaven, and are in actual danger of eternal death! Go, then, if you wish to return to God, seek some one who will bring you back to the right road. Seek a learned, prudent, and pious confessor, and opening your conscience to him as thoroughly as you would to the almighty God, follow his advice in all things.

If you have already found one of the kind, however, do not leave him without necessity. Keep to him as long as you can. Some people are constantly changing their confessor. That cannot possibly be good for them. In the first place, they who fall into sin through inveterate habit, or who are in the proximate occasion of sin, must either keep to one confessor or tell their sins again to their new confessor. Otherwise, he will not be able to help them, and their confessions will be invalid. In the second place, they who do not usually commit mortal sins cannot receive proper guidance and direction if they have not always the same guide, who knows their conscience, and can prescribe wholesome remedies for them. He who has been sick of a fever and has been cured by a good doctor, if he gets sick again, will send for the same doctor. Why? Because he knows the sick man's constitution and can prescribe for him at once, which a stranger could not do. So it is also, due proportion being observed, with the maladies of the soul. Therefore, if possible, keep to the one confessor, provided he is a good one, and pray to that effect often, that God may send his good angel to lead you and to keep you from wandering off the right road to salvation (Mach. 15 : 23). I am sick of soul, O Lord; lead me to a physician who will certainly cure me.

I am blind and ignorant; grant that I may find a guide who will keep me in the right path. Give me a confessor who will oppose my evil inclinations by his instructions, reproofs, and exhortations, and who will cleanse my soul from all stain, that I may be converted to thee with my whole heart, and after this life arrive at that happy place where nothing defiled may enter! Amen.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

PRAYER BEFORE CONFESSION.

"*He struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*" Luke 18 : 13.

What cannot humble prayer obtain from God? A great, public, and notorious sinner gains more by simply striking his breast, and heaving a penitent sigh, with the few words, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner," than the proud Pharisee with all his fasting, alms-deeds, and other good works. "I say to you," such is the testimony our Lord gives on the matter, "this man went down into his house justified rather than the other." Sinners, behold the true pattern of a penitent! You must imitate the public sinner, if you are really determined to get rid of the filth of your sins in the Sacrament of Penance and to return to God with your whole hearts.

I. The sinner who wishes to return to God by a good confession must pray to God with humility.

II. While the sinner must pray with the publican: "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner," the just man must also pray that he may preserve the grace of God.

I. No one can do the least good work deserving of a supernatural reward, unless he is helped by the grace of God. "As

the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine," says our Lord, "so neither can you, unless you abide in me. For without me you can do nothing" (John 15: 4, 5). Who in these words instructs the hearts of the humble, that they may not be exalted by their good works, but humbly ascribe every good thing that is in them to the grace and mercy of God ; and stops the mouths of the proud, who attribute everything to themselves and to their own strength. "Without me you can do nothing." He does not say, without me you can do only a little, but, nothing, not even the least thing, can you do without me. Now, if this is undoubtedly true of the just man, who being in the state of grace, is a friend and child of God, how much less can the sinner do penance and recover the friendship of God by his own efforts? According to the decree of the Council of Trent, "if any one says that a man can believe, hope, love, or repent properly, without the previous inspiration and assistance of the Holy Ghost. . . . let him be anathema." Mark the words, "do penance properly." The traitor Judas did penance, as the Gospel says: "Judas. . . repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and ancients" (Matt. 27: 3). Full of sorrow, he confessed his sin. "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood" (Ibid. 4). But his repentance was not of the right sort, and it did not obtain for him the forgiveness of his sin. It was a mere natural sorrow, that deprived him of all hopes of happiness, and reduced him to despair. "He departed, and went and hanged himself with a halter" (Ibid. 5).

1. What do you do, unhappy mortal, when you break the commandments of God by committing mortal sin? You deliberately put out your own eyes, and deprive yourself of the light of your soul. "They shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord" (Soph. 1: 17). They will stumble from one fault into another. And how can you recover your sight? Who can restore it to you? None other but he, of whom St. John says: "That was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world" (John 1: 9). He it is who wishes to

be appealed to in the words of the blind man: "Lord, that I may see" (Luke 18:41). Hear St. Augustine, in his soliloquy with God: "Too late have I known thee, O true Light."

2. And what have you done besides, unhappy mortal, when you sinned grievously? You deliberately cast yourself down into the depths of the abyss: "The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth" (Prov. 18:3). And how are you to come forth from that abyss? Ah, to no purpose would you strive; you would be lost and buried forever, if God did not stretch forth his hand to you and help you by his grace. Besides, you have fettered yourself in this abyss with so many chains, and have shut the door so fast on yourself; that you have made it almost impossible for you to come out; as the penitent David deplores: "The cords of the wicked have encompassed me" (Ps. 118:61); so that even if I wished, I could not free myself. To break these chains, to open the door of this prison, is in his power alone, who saith in the Apocalypse: "I have the keys of death and of hell (Apoc. 1:18); and who has said to Peter, "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19). "And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven" (Matt. 16:19).

3. Finally, unhappy mortal, when you commit mortal sin, you cruelly murder yourself, inasmuch as you take away the life of your poor soul. "If I do as they ask me, and commit sin," said the chaste Susanna, when straitened by the godless elders, it will be the death of my soul, "But it is better for me to fall into your hands without doing it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord" (Dan. 13:23). I would rather die a thousand times, than sin before the Lord, and thereby inflict eternal death on my soul. Once dead, O sinner, who will, who can recall your soul to life again? Ah, that is not in your own power. That requires the almighty power of God. If he, by his grace, does not call you forth, like another

Lazarus, from the grave of sin, you are and must remain dead forever. There is no other means for you to regain life, but the help of God.

From this it follows, in the first place, that he who is guilty of grievous sin is most presumptuous; for he deliberately places himself in a state from which it is impossible for him to free himself by his own unassisted efforts. God is not bound to give the sinner the grace of true repentance; and, yet, no man can repent sincerely without that grace.

It follows, in the second place, that the sinner acts most rashly towards his poor soul, when he defers repentance, in the face of those good inspirations, thoughts, and graces which God bestows on him. For he does not know whether he will ever again be offered the help that God now offers him. It is the same as if he said: *I know*, O Lord, *that thou wilt now restore my sight*, and that if thou dost not do so, I shall be in darkness forever; but I do not wish to see the light as yet; if thou offerest it to me at some other time, I will accept it. *Thou stretchest out thy beneficent hand to help me out of the depths of the abyss*, into which I have wilfully cast myself, but thou mayest go away now; I prefer to remain here a little longer; hereafter, when it suits me better, thou mayest return and help me out. *Thou art willing to break the chains that keep me bound in the slavery of the devil;* but I do not wish to *be set* at liberty now. Hereafter, when I shall have changed my mind, thou mayest do what thou art willing to do now. *Thou desirest to free my soul now from eternal death;* but I do not wish to live at present. At some future time, thou mayest render me that service, and help me to arise from the grave. Ah, presumptuous mortal! how can you dare to entertain such thoughts? "Today, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps. 94 : 8). Now, at this moment, if you hear the voice of God calling to you, do not close your ears, but accept the proffered grace, for it may never be offered you again.

II. Hence, it follows that the sinner must humbly beg of God

the grace of true repentance and conversion, so that what he is unable to do by his own natural powers may become possible to him by the help of divine grace. It is true that the merciful God is always ready and willing to give to the repenting sinner the grace of conversion, and he has assured us of this with an oath: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezech. 33 : 11). Mark the desire that the Lord has to help all sinners; so great is it, that he calls it his life, as it were. If a man does anything very willingly it is said to be his life; thus, eating and drinking is his life; hunting is his life; study is his life, and the meaning of that is, that the man finds his greatest pleasure in those occupations. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way." My greatest pleasure, my life, is to help him and show him mercy. Nevertheless, God does not force his help and grace on any unwilling soul. He desires to be asked for them : "Ask," he says, "and you shall receive" (John 16 : 24). Sometimes, it is true, the Lord knocks uninvited at the door of certain hearts. He gives the sinner powerful inspirations and graces to urge him to repent, so that his heart is filled to overflowing with contrition and sorrow, although he never asked those graces from God, and was actually continuing to commit sin, without the least thought of repentance. But such cases are, so to speak, miracles and wonders of the divine mercy. It would be great presumption to expect anything of the kind in one's own case. As a general rule, God gives his grace to those who are prepared to receive it. The first grace is usually a salutary thought and desire of the sinner to be converted; from this desire, springs the impulse to pray humbly to God for the grace of true repentance. But if that prayer be neglected, the other graces are withheld ; and frequently, they are never offered the sinner again.

Therefore, pray humbly and fervently, like the publican in to-day's Gospel, knowing that you can do nothing of yourselves: "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Pray, not only in the ordinary

way, before confession, that you may know the number of your sins; but, what is more important, pray for true contrition and sorrow, that you may return to God with all your heart. And you especially, obdurate sinners, who have neither wish nor desire to do penance, and who think it impossible to give up your sinful habits, and amend your lives, do not become so desperate as to renounce prayer altogether. Send up your sighs to heaven, and cry out daily with the blind man, "Lord, that I may see!" Be merciful to me, a sinner, that I may not die impenitent! So you should pray, if you are still in the state of sin and feel no desire to repent; and you should also be diligent in hearing sermons, for the good God is specially generous with his graces when the faithful are assembled to hear his word.

And you, just souls, learn from what has been said to be truly humble of heart. Do not imagine that, if you have been hitherto free from mortal sin, or have committed less sin than others, that this is to be ascribed to your own natural strength. The same God, whose grace is necessary to enable the sinner to do penance, must also keep the just from falling into sin. All Christians, without exception, must pray daily, "lead us not into temptation," that is: Help us, O Lord, that we may not be separated from thee and thy friendship by any temptation! Keep us from those occasions and allurements in which thou foreseest that our weakness would lead us into sin! Think and say often, with humility and thankfulness: If thou, O Lord, hadst not preserved me in so many dangerous occasions of sin, if thou hadst not borne me in thy hands by thy powerful grace, into how many grievous sins might I not have fallen? And therefore I say, with St. Augustine, "I attribute it to thy mercy and grace that thou hast freed me from my sins, and that I have avoided whatever evil I have not committed. May thy grace, O Lord, always prevent and follow us, and grant that we may be always intent on good works, through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Amen.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE NATURE OF THE EXAMEN OF CONSCIENCE.

"*He hath made both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.*"
Mark 7 : 37.

After the light of the Holy Ghost has been implored by fervent prayer, the next requisite for a good confession is the examen of conscience, or the effort to find out what sins we have committed. As many confessions are not made properly because of a lack of this requisite, remember, my brethren,

I. That he who wishes to make a good confession must examine his conscience himself; and

II. That he who wishes to make a good confession must examine his conscience with proper diligence and care.

I. He who wishes to make a good confession must examine his conscience. This is required by the nature and essentials of the Sacrament of Penance, which has been instituted by our Lord as a kind of judgment. In civil courts of justice, no one is questioned unless he has been caught in the act of committing a crime, or has been accused by some one else. Otherwise, the accused need not confess his guilt. Nay, he can deny it unless it is proved against him. It is quite different with the Sacrament of Penance; the criminal must accuse himself, without being questioned, or having his crime proved against him. Of his own free will, he must make known his own evil deeds. He is at the same time the criminal, the accuser, and the witness. The judge who sits in the holy tribunal in the place of God, has to pronounce sentence only on what he learns from the penitent's self-accusation. How can a man accuse himself, when he does not know of what he has been guilty? And how can he know that,

unless he has thought of,and examined into, and remembered what he has done against the law of God? From this, it is evident, that they act very wrongly and foolishly who rush into the confessional without any preparation, trusting solely to the questions of the confessor. Would it not be a foolish thing for you to accuse a man in judgment, saying to the judge: This man has committed a great crime; but you must ask me what he has done? What could you expect as the result of an accusation of that kind? Still more unreasonable is your conduct when you go to confession, and say to the priest: Father, I have sinned; please question me. You yourself must declare in what and how often you have sinned. The priest is not sitting there to ask you questions, but to hear what you have to say against yourself. He is not sitting there to accuse you, but to judge you according to the sins you confess to him; and, if you are worthy, to give you absolution from them.

It may sometimes occur that through weakness, or illness, or stupidity, or simplicity, one cannot undertake the examen of conscience, or knows not how to set about it. In a case of that kind, charity obliges the confessor to help his penitent as far as possible, and to supply for his incapacity by asking him questions. But God does not require much in the way of examination from people of the kind; and therefore, theologians say that it is enough for an ignorant, uneducated man, who cannot recollect anything particular, to excite himself to sorrow for all his past sins, and to be prepared, when he enters the confessional, to answer all the questions put to him by the confessor, and to declare honestly what has been his condition, occupation, and mode of life hitherto. But when a man has common sense enough in matters relating to his family, or business concerns, and can remember the good or the evil that others have done him, if he were to pretend ignorance or forgetfulness in what concerns the all-important business of his soul, and to say: I cannot remember anything; Father, please question me;—such conduct would be nothing but wilful carelessness and he would not fulfil the commandment of God,

which St. Paul makes known to us in the words: "Let a man prove himself" (1 Cor. 11 : 28), that is, let a man examine his own conscience.

Besides, it is a well-known and undoubted necessity that one should confess all his sins (that is to say, all his mortal sins that have not yet been properly confessed), declaring their number, along with the circumstances that notably aggravate their guilt, or at least those circumstances that change their nature. If even one of them is omitted through culpable ignorance or wilful negligence, the confession and the absolution are null and void. But how can you reasonably expect to escape the danger of making an invalid confession, if you do not examine your conscience, but leave the whole matter to your confessor? Must he guess what you have done against the commandments of God, and how often and how grievously you have sinned? Do you wish to act like King Nabuchodonosor, who expected his sooth-sayers to tell him what he had dreamt? "I have dreamed a dream," he said to them, "and am troubled in mind and know not what I dreamed . . . therefore tell me the dream and the interpretation thereof" (Dan. 2 : 3, 6). A ridiculous thing certainly for the king to ask, and therefore the sooth-sayers said to him: "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will declare the interpretation of it" (Dan. 2).

I have sinned, you say to your confessor: Father, please question me. And what is he to question you about? How does he know what you have done? Has he seen your thoughts during the week, month, quarter, or half year that has elapsed since your last confession? Has he heard all you have said during that time at home and in company? Has he been here, there, and everywhere with you, like the omnipresent God himself? Generally speaking, he does not even know who you are; he has never been in company with you, and perhaps has never seen you before. And remember well, it is not enough merely to go through the commandments of God and of the Church; but each one has to pay particular attention to his state and occupa-

tion, because, generally speaking, there is a difference between the sins committed by married people and those who are unmarried ; by masters and mistresses, and by servants ; by officials and superiors, and by subjects and inferiors ; by merchants and shop-keepers, and by tradesmen and laborers ; by citizens in the town, and by peasants in the country. The different states of life have their separate duties and obligations, and their separate dangers and occasions of sin. But how can one who knows nothing whatever of your affairs guess at, or find out by questions, what you have in the depths of your conscience? You have quite enough to do to find out all about it yourself, and to get a clear idea of what you have done against God and your neighbor in thought, desire, word, and deed. How, then, can you imagine that you will be able, when your confessor asks you one or two questions, to remember at once all those circumstances of place, time, opportunity, and company, so as to answer the questions properly, and say with certainty, yes, I have done that; no, I have not done that; I have committed that sin so and so often? Even if you are asked a hundred questions, and have given a hundred answers, how can you trust to those answers, which must be very uncertain, for the validity of the absolution you expect to receive ? Are you not thus running the risk of nullifying the holy Sacrament of Penance, and dishonoring it by a grievous sacrilege? If you leave out a mortal sin, and it is hardly to be expected that you should not under the circumstances, whose fault is it? Your own; because you did not examine your conscience as you should have done; and your ignorance is the result of a culpable negligence, which will not excuse you before God. Therefore one should examine his conscience before confession; and, as the forgiveness of sin depends on it, this examination must not be made lightly and in a superficial manner, but

II. With due care and diligence.

No general rule can be laid down with regard to the amount of time and care that are to be employed in the examination of

conscience before confession; for penitents differ widely in their conditions and capabilities, and some require more time and care than others. According to circumstances each one must employ what can be called, in the general acceptation of the term, a reasonable diligence. The Council of Trent says distinctly that diligence should be used in the examen of conscience; "all mortal sins that one finds on his conscience after a *diligent* examination must be declared in confession." And farther on, speaking of the obligation of confessing all mortal sins, it says, "which occur to the memory after due and *diligent* reflection." But the Council does not specify the amount of time or diligence required.

The safest rule to follow, is, for one to employ as much time and diligence, according to his state of life, as all sensible people would employ in any other matter of great importance. To make this clearer, I will explain it by a simile. You have an important account to render in which there is question of a large sum of money. If you give in your accounts every week or fortnight regularly, the matter is easy enough, and does not require much trouble on your part. All you have to do, is to look at your account-book, and you will see it all at a glance. But if it is many months, or even years, since you squared up your reckoning, and if, moreover, you have allowed things to get into disorder through carelessness; or, if you have otherwise been prevented from keeping your books properly, and if, at the same time, the master who demands the account is a very exact and careful man, who holds all your interests completely in his hands, how would you act? Would you think an hour or even a whole day too much to spend in putting the matter into order? My opinion is, that whole weeks and months would hardly seem long enough to you; and meanwhile, you would give up all other business, and would tell your servant not to allow any one to interrupt you. In a word, you would strain all your powers of memory and understanding to set matters right, especially if your master kept on urging you, in the words of the rich man in the Gospel: "Give an account of thy stewardship" (Luke 16: 2). So it is with you, O sinner, when you are pre-

paring for confession. You are about to undertake a great business on which the happiness of your soul for all eternity depends, and if you make a grievous and culpable error in your accounts, you will certainly be ruined. Is this matter perhaps of less importance to you than your temporal and transitory prosperity? Are not worldly goods worth less than nothing when compared to the treasures of your immortal soul? He who demands the account from you is the great God himself. Is he, perhaps, less experienced in his own affairs, less exacting in his claims, less just and powerful in his punishments, than a mere mortal? Hear what he says of himself by the Psalmist: "The searcher of hearts and reins is God" (Ps. 7: 10). "I will search Jerusalem with lamps" (Soph. 1: 12).

Are your accounts clear, correct, and in good order? If so, then you need not be afraid. You need not spend much time, nor be too scrupulous in examining your conscience before confession. If you happen to commit a mortal sin, there is no danger of your forgetting it. As to venial sins, you are not bound to tell them in confession; so that, even if you forget them by the thousand, or deliberately refuse to mention them, that does not interfere with the validity of your confession. All you have to do is to mention some sin of your past life, for which you can excite yourself to sorrow, and your confession is valid; your account is approved of by the almighty God, who signs it by giving you the grace of the Sacrament. There are many who make a great mistake, and cause themselves unnecessary anxiety by the useless trouble they take in the examination of their consciences, so that they turn the confessional into a rack to torture their souls, and make the sweet burden of Jesus Christ insupportable. These people, although they cannot remember having committed any mortal sin since their last confession (and they go regularly and frequently during the month), yet spend half and even whole hours sometimes thinking of what they will say. They make sins where there is no sin at all, and they doubt about everything. The more they try to examine their consciences, the more disturbed

they become; and at last, they are obliged to acknowledge that, after having spent hours in all sorts of distractions and fancies, they are just as wise as before, and have not learned anything about the state of their consciences. The most useful, necessary, and excellent preparation for confession is a lively faith, a great hope and confidence in God, a true sorrow for sin, a firm purpose of amendment, a careful examination and selection of the means and manner in which one may lead a better life, lessen one's daily faults, serve God with more zeal, do more good works, and have more will to do them. That is what most of the time should be spent in.

Are you one of those whose accounts are not in order? One of those tepid Christians, who sin by wholesale, and lead careless lives; who pay little attention to their souls, go to confession one, two, three, or four times a year, and meanwhile commit sin whenever the occasion offers, without much hesitation; allow full liberty to eyes, ears, tongues, hands, thoughts, and desires; seldom or never examine their consciences; easily forget their sins, and the number and circumstances of them; or, if they go to confession every month, commit sins that are of a peculiarly dangerous character, and are likely to be the occasion of more sin; such as a long-continued habit of this or that vice, in which they show no signs of amendment from one confession to another; sins of injustice, scandal, detraction, vindictiveness, and enmity; habitual drunkenness; continual dissensions between married people or neighbors, all of which can be the occasion of many sins to others; an impure attachment to a certain person, which places one in the proximate occasion of sin, and gives rise to thousands of sinful thoughts, desires, words, and deeds, by day and night. Are you, I say, one of those people? If so, then it alters the question altogether. You, and such as you, require a far longer time, and much more care and diligence in examining your conscience before confession, in order to satisfy your obligation and to square your accounts with God. Would you think a whole day too much to spend in

bringing such an account as yours into order? But what do I say? A day? You will not even spend an hour in it; you sit in the church for a quarter of an hour or so, and go through the commandments of God in a kind of a way, go into the confessional when your turn comes, rattle off a dozen mortal sins more or less, and then expect to get absolution. How is it possible for you, in such a short time, to have a clear knowledge of the many sins you have committed in thought, word, and deed? But if you have forgotten some and do not tell them, do you think that your forgetfulness will excuse you before your Judge? I, for my part, do not think so; for your laziness is your own fault, and your confession and repentance are worth nothing. Therefore, you must spend more time in the examen of conscience, and must employ an amount of diligence proportionate to your state and occupation and to the nature of your sins.

The penitent David says: "And I meditated in the night with my own heart, and I was exercised, and I swept my spirit" (Ps. 76 : 7). What do you do, when you wish to sweep out your room, so as to have it perfectly clean? You go through every corner of it; you put all the chairs and tables to one side, and move the furniture, so that no dust may remain concealed behind it. So must you act, sinner, if you wish to do sincere penance. Enter the chamber of your conscience; seek out all its hidden recesses; examine, as far as you can, all your thoughts, desires, words, and actions, to see if you can detect a mortal sin in any of them. Move all the chairs and tables; that is: consider the habits, business, and occupations that engage your attention from morning till night, the places and houses you frequent, the company you keep, the obligations of your state, and how you have fulfilled them, so as to see whether and how often you have sinned against God and your neighbor, and what effects, injury, or scandal have followed from those sins, which you foresaw and could easily have prevented. If, on account of a long-continued habit of a certain vice, or the occasions in which you are placed, you cannot find out the exact number of times you have sinned,

then, try to recollect how long you have been addicted to that vice, and how often you fell into sin probably during the day. Above all, call upon God for light and help. Say, with the penitent David: "Who can understand sins?" (Ibid. 18: 13.) I have sinned, O Lord; I have sinned grievously; I have sinned often; but how can I find out the number and nature of my sins, unless thou comest to the assistance of my memory? "O my God, enlighten my darkness" (Ibid. 17 : 29). Thou hast numbered all my steps, and hast written down all the movements of my heart; enlighten, then, my understanding, that I may know all my sins, repent of them, confess them properly, and not commit them again. In that way, you will make a good examen before confession, and even if a mortal sin should escape your memory, or you cannot say the exact number of times you have sinned, your forgetfulness will then be inculpable, and will not be attributed to you, so that you will be validly absolved from all your sins. Amen.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

CANDOR IN THE EXAMEN OF CONSCIENCE.

"*Seeing him, passed by.*" Luke 10: 31.

As the priest and the Levite acted in the parable of to-day's Gospel, so do many sinners act nowadays when they wish to purify their souls in the Sacrament of Penance. Those sinful souls are represented by the poor traveler who fell into the hands of robbers. But, while that poor man could not heal himself, while he had to trust to the charity of another for his cure, the sinner must heal himself in the Sacrament of Penance with the help of God. Yet, I repeat, he acts sometimes like the hard-hearted priest in the Gospel, who, "seeing him, passed by," and went on his way, without doing anything for the unfortunate man who

was lying half dead and covered with wounds. It is in the examination of their consciences especially, that sinners are guilty of imitating the conduct of the priest ; they look at their sins in a superficial manner, and thus pass over many mortal wounds. But there is another fault, which is the occasion of many sins being passed over, and that is a want of candor in the examen of conscience. This fault is committed

I. By scrupulous souls who look on themselves as more guilty than they really are ; and

II. By more culpable souls who regard themselves as more innocent than they really are.

I. In a court of justice both the judge and the accuser must be on their guard against calumniating the accused. They must not impute to him, through falsehood and malice, a crime of which he is innocent ; nor must they accuse him on mere suspicion and without sufficient proof ; nor have recourse to false arguments to make a minor crime appear greater than it is, and deserving of death. For if mere suspicion, envy, falsehood, and malice were allowed to influence a judge, then every honest man might be condemned as a malefactor. The same care, candor, and honesty must be used in the examination of our consciences before confession ; for the sinner is then his own accuser. You must therefore be on your guard, O sinner, against wronging yourself, or accusing yourself falsely of sin, through fear, anxiety, unfounded doubts, or mere suspicion ; nor must you make great sins of small ones, nor certain of doubtful ones, lest you should accuse yourself to your judge of crimes of which you are not guilty. "I was exercised, and I swept my spirit"(Ps. 76 : 7), says David of himself. "Swept," means in the Hebrew, "I looked at myself" and its signification here is,"I looked at myself in my spirit." This simile is admirably suited to our subject ; for when you are trying to recollect your sins, your conscience must resemble a mirror, which represents all objects that are held before it as neither greater, nor smaller, nor uglier, nor more beautiful, than they are in

themselves. There are mirrors so made as to represent the object in different colors, although the latter may be snow-white; mirrors that are cut in such a way as to multiply the object, so that, when one looks into them, he sees himself twenty, thirty, or fifty times; mirrors that make the object much greater than it really is, so that, when you look at yourself in them, you appear to be a monster, your head is like a giant's, your elbows are like trees, your eyes like two large globes; in a word, they make you appear a monster, although you are not in reality a whit altered in stature. It seems to me that many, especially pious and conscientious Christians, stand before mirrors of that kind when they are making the examen of conscience before confession; their consciences are of such a nature that they make what is good appear bad, what is small, great, and what is only one they multiply indefinitely in number.

1. There are those who, when they have done anything, no matter what, without the least thought or suspicion of sin, and hear afterwards, in a sermon or elsewhere, that it is unlawful, become at once troubled and anxious. Alas, they say to themselves, what have I been doing all this time? And I never even confessed it. What am I to do? Thus, they at once condemn themselves of sin, although they are perfectly innocent, and consider themselves bound to declare it in their next confession. But what are you thinking of? You are guilty of calumniating and detracting yourself; for, even if what you did were the greatest sin in the world, you did it through invincible ignorance, since you had no suspicion at the time that it was unlawful; and therefore, you are not guilty, because what is done with a good conscience cannot be afterwards made bad by any subsequent knowledge one gains regarding it. Hence, it is not matter for confession. But, if you are nevertheless bent on accusing yourself of it, which is quite unnecessary, and is a waste of precious time, then, at least, you ought to add (and you are bound in conscience to add) that you did it with a good conscience, so that the judge, who is sitting

there in the place of the almighty God, may not look on you as guilty of a sin of which you are innocent, and may not be deceived in his judgment about you by yourself.

2. There are scrupulous people who are incapable of forming a sound opinion in those matters concerning which they are scrupulous. If, when preparing for confession, they look over the Ten Commandments, or the table of sins in their prayer-books, they think they are guilty of every one of them, although there is not the least foundation for a supposition of the kind ; and, brooding over their fancied guilt, they fix it firmly in their imagination, until at last they look on it as an undoubted fact.

3. The third class consists of those who make mountains out of mole-hills, and mortal sins out of venial, certainties out of doubts, and even vices out of virtues. They look on all impure thoughts that come into their heads, even against their will, as so many mortal sins ; every thought against faith, although they reject it at once, they put down immediately as a sin of heresy ; a want of confidence in God they consider blasphemy ; a suspicion against their neighbor, as a rash judgment, and every feeling of vexation in their daily crosses, as impatience and despair. The more they brood over those things, the more do they become persuaded that they are guilty ; and as there is no counting the thoughts that come into their heads, so it seems to them that their sins are beyond numbering. Like people who blind themselves by looking too long at the sun, they make themselves almost incapable of looking at the matter in a reasonable light. Scrupulous people of that kind, since they cannot form a sound judgment of their own actions, must spend a very short time in the examen of conscience, and, should never accuse themselves of mortal sin, unless they are infallibly certain, without any previous examen of conscience, that they have really committed a wilful, deliberate, grievous sin. Nay, so certain must they be of their guilt, that they must be prepared to swear to it, if necessary, before God and the priest. If they refuse to do that, all the mortal sins they accuse themselves of are

mere imagination. Therefore, whenever a doubt occurs to them as to whether they have done this or that, or consented to bad thoughts or not, they can and must, without further examination, at once conclude they are not guilty, and reject all their anxious doubts as mere nonsense, because the devil seeks, by means of those doubts, to disturb their minds and to prevent them from having real devotion. There is only one cure for such scrupulous people, and that is, that they always go to the one confessor, who must be an experienced man, and obey his directions blindly and humbly. If they refuse to do that, there is no help for them in their misery. So much for those who, through excessive anxiety, make themselves out to be more guilty than they really are. But I fear that the number of the other class of penitents is much greater, namely, of those who, through carelessness of their salvation, when examining their consciences, *Look on themselves as more innocent than they really are in the sight of God. Thereby, they run the risk of never making a good confession, and so expose their souls to the greatest danger.*

II. Just as there are mirrors which make small things appear great, and beautiful things ugly, so there are others made in such a way as to diminish what is really large, and to minimize deformities. Again, no matter how good and true a mirror is in itself, if you go too close to it, so as to breathe on it, you will darken it, so that you will not be able to see anything. The consciences of many sinners, when they are preparing for confession, are like those mirrors. They look on grievous sins as venial, and on venial sins as no sins at all. They approach too close, so that they see their sins only darkly; that is, they argue too much with their consciences, seeking all sorts of pretexts to excuse themselves from certain sins, until at last they persuade themselves that there is no harm in them.

1. These are, first, sinners whose consciences are callous, so that they do not feel the sins they commit, unless they do something very bad in outward act. These people examine themselves only

on the actions they do against the Commandments. They make nothing of thoughts and desires, of secret pleasure, of looks and words, and do not even count them as sins, although in reality they may be grievously sinful, especially in the matter of impurity, or hatred and revenge, even before any outward act is committed. But such people trouble themselves little about that. As long as they cannot satisfy their bad desires (either through want of opportunity, or because they have changed their intention), they consider that they are free from sin; or else, if they do take notice of such thoughts, they seek to excuse themselves by saying that they had no bad intention. But what a lame excuse that is! To entertain impure thoughts for instance, deliberately, and wilfully to adhere to them, if only for an instant, knowing them to be evil, is already a mortal sin, no matter whether there is or is not the intention of doing an unlawful action.

2. There are others whose evil inclinations and desires blindfold their consciences, so that they now and then cannot see or acknowledge their sins and the malice of them; and this is especially the case in sins of habit, or in vices to which they are much attached. For instance, a man thinks of nothing all the day long but how he may make some temporal profit, so as to become rich; he does not trouble himself to ask whether the means he makes use of to that end are lawful or not; as long as he can make the profit, he is satisfied. Another centres his thoughts altogether on pleasure; he is always trying to satisfy his sensuality, and he takes it for granted that whatever helps him to this end is lawful enough. He frequents all sorts of company without the least scruple; he laughs, jokes, and amuses himself with persons of the opposite sex, whenever opportunity offers, and he allows full liberty to eyes, ears, hands, and tongue. Now in all this, there is evidently danger of sins of all kinds; nay, humanly speaking, it must be that he offends God in different ways. When it comes to the examen of conscience before confession, these people close their eyes to all

these sins. They do not look into the mirror properly, lest they should see too clearly. They do not want to awaken the worm of conscience, and be disturbed in their pleasures by its gnawings.

3. The third class consists of those who, as it were, hang up a curtain before their consciences, that they may not see and have to acknowledge themselves guilty of certain sins. A doubt (and that, too, not always an unfounded one), occurs to them sometimes, as to whether their mode of life, of dress, of behavior in company, is quite in accordance with the law of Jesus Christ or not; and then, the custom of the world comes in most conveniently as a curtain with which to hide the whole affair, so as to keep their conscience quiet about it. "A sinful man shall flee reproof, and will find an excuse according to his will" (Ecclus. 32: 20); that is, he will try to excuse what he wishes to excuse. But what excuse will he find? Will he try to compare himself with just and pious men? No ; for their lives would condemn his. He compares himself rather with those who resemble himself, and who follow the vain customs of the world. The Gospel, and even his own uneasy conscience call out to him, if he will but hear it: This or that is not lawful ; it goes directly against the principles of the Gospel of Christ. And what answer does he make? Oh, he says, others do the same; it is the custom of the world! This or that confessor does not look on it as a sin. Other confessors say nothing whatever about it; there can be no great harm in it, therefore. Thus, they throw a veil over their consciences and, when examining themselves before confession, do not even think of looking into those matters. They continue to go with many others along the road which worldly vanity, in direct opposition to the Christian law, has made for them. But, you who act in this manner, wait till you come to the end of that road ; you will find that it leads to a quarter, where many like you have already gone. The door by which the chosen children of God enter heaven is, you must know, very small and narrow. Many, indeed, are called to enter thereat, but few will be admitted; "few there are that find it"(Matt. 7:14).

When your Judge shall demand a strict account from you, bring forward your excuse, "Others did the same; it was the common custom in the world," and see what it will profit you. The question will then be, not what others have done, but what you yourself have done; not how others have lived, but how you yourself should have lived with others. "Thou shalt not follow the multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou yield in judgment to the opinion of the most part, to stray from the truth" (Exod. 23 : 2). Will you, then, lose your soul for the sake of others, who also lose theirs?

4. There is another class of penitents who do not find out all their sins when preparing for confession, because they look only at one half of themselves in the glass. They are like one who holds a mirror so that he can see into it with only one eye; thus the half of his face is hidden from him, nor has he any idea of what it is like. They first examine how they have offended God in thought, word, or deed, since their last confession; but they never think of seeing *how* they have fulfilled the duties and obligations of their state of life, so that they often leave out grievous sins, which they could and should have known. A pious and zealous priest, hearing once the confession of a great emperor, said to him: "I have now heard the *sins of Charles;* let me hear *those of the Emperor also.*"

Husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers of families, you have finished your examen of conscience, have you not? But I am afraid that many sins, which you should have thought of, first of all, have escaped your memories. How have you observed the mutual obligations of your state? What care have you bestowed on the spiritual welfare of those subject to you? How have you looked after your children? Are you training them properly, and sending them to catechism and to sermons? Are you watchful over all their actions, so that you know where they go, whom they speak to, what company they keep, how they live, and whether they fear and love God? What example do you give them? What do they see in you and hear from you during the day?

How do you look after their temporal wants? Do you squander in drinking or gambling, in useless entertainments, or in dressing above your state, what you should spend on them? Do you keep them busy at some work befitting their state, or do you allow them to spend the day in idleness? Do you permit them to go to parties in which their precious souls can easily be exposed to danger? Do you give proper food and wages to your servants and laborers? All these things belong to the examen of conscience. But the obligations of particular states of life are seldom brought before the mirror; the sins committed against them are hidden in the depths of conscience; they are rarely made the subject of serious consideration, and therefore the accusation in confession is incomplete.

Further, people, generally speaking, examine the sins they have committed themselves. But what about the sins of others which you have occasioned or might have occasioned by impure conversation, by indecent signs and laughter, by immodesty in dress, by keeping improper pictures or statues in your houses or gardens, and thus running the risk of exciting impure desires and thoughts in the minds of those who see them; by selling, lending, or borrowing impure books and love-tales, that are liable to put bad thoughts into the minds of those who read them; and by any immodesty in dress; by urging others to excessive drinking; by giving bad advice or encouraging others to sin; by doing a sinful act in presence of others; by cursing or swearing before children, and so teaching them that hellish language? These are the sins from which David so often prayed to be delivered: "From those," the sins "of others spare thy servant" (Ps. 18: 14).

Finally, it is not enough to examine yourself on what you yourself have done to offend God, and on what you have caused others to do; you must not forget also to give an account of what you have left undone. For instance, you could and should have given your neighbor here and there a friendly warning, have kept him away from evil, urged him to good, or prevented him from doing or saying something sinful; but you have not done so.

You had now and then an opportunity of saluting in a friendly manner, or doing a service to a person who had injured you, but through hatred, you did not avail yourself of it. You could have paid your debts at the proper time, or have given your laborers the wages due to them, or have made restitution of ill-gotten goods; but you did not do so. You might have given alms to the poor and needy according to your means, and have practised the works of Christian charity towards your neighbor; but you neglected doing so through avarice or sloth. These are the omissions that Jesus Christ will bring forward, on that last terrible day, against the wicked: "For I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat" (Matt. 25 : 42).

Ah, what a fearful number of sins thus remain hidden in the conscience, because, through carelessness and culpable ignorance, people wish to know nothing about them! They look in the glass with but one eye. To many penitents one might say with truth what a doctor once said to a young man who showed him a small sore on his finger, and complained of the pain it caused him; "Ah, my friend," said the doctor, who knew by the color and the pulse of his patient that the latter was suffering from a dangerous illness, "the evil is not in your finger alone; the chief cause of your suffering is hidden from you; your blood must be purified and your stomach put into order, or else we shall soon have to carry you to the grave." In the same way, there are many who come to the spiritual physician and show him some trifling sores that trouble them; that is, they confess merely their daily faults. But if the priest could see into their consciences, might he not say to each of them: "Poor soul! your evil does not consist merely in what you have told me! What you have kept back, and concealed from yourself, will be the cause of eternal death to you, unless you repent of, and confess it!" "Son of man," said the Lord to the prophet Ezechiel, "dig in the wall" (8 : 8). "Go in and see the wicked abominations which they commit here" (Ibid. 9). My child, the priest might say, "dig in the wall," examine the hidden recesses of your conscience, and there you will find a mass of sins that

you have not wished to see hitherto. You will see many sins of your own, which have been hitherto concealed from your eyes by an inordinate love of creatures, by your evil desires, and by all sorts of empty pretexts and excuses. You will see many sins of which you were the occasion to others by the scandal you gave them. You will see many omissions of the good that you were bound to do. Do you think, perhaps, that in the Day of Judgment you will be able to justify yourself from all these by saying: "I have not known anything about those sins; I did not think that this or that was a grievous sin; I did not look on it as necessary to examine my conscience about those things?" "You did not wish to know," will be the answer of your Judge: "you did not wish to acknowledge your misdeeds; you have not examined your conscience with candor; your ignorance was wilful and culpable; true, your confessor, either because he knew nothing of your secret transgressions, or had not the courage to warn you about them, has often pronounced over you the words, 'I absolve thee from thy sins;' but I, who know the secrets of the heart, and search the reins, I said at the same time, 'I condemn thee on account of thy sins.'"

But before it comes to that with us, let us in future, whenever we go to confession, act with candor in the examen of conscience. What is the advantage of deceiving ourselves in a matter which so closely concerns our eternal salvation? What is the good of trying to make ourselves appear more innocent than we really are in the sight of God? Let each one, when he is examining his conscience, act as if he were making an inquiry against a stranger, nay, against his greatest enemy; so that he may pass over nothing, and excuse nothing that he can with truth bring against himself. Let us say with David: "The sins of my youth and my ignorances do not remember" (Ps. 24: 7). "From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord, and from those of others, spare thy servant" (Ibid. 18: 13, 14). Pardon the sins of which I have in any way been the occasion, by scandal-giving. "Send forth thy light and thy truth" (Ibid. 42: 3). Enlighten me with thy light that I may

know all the sins of my past life, repent of them with all my heart, confess them properly, do penance for them, avoid them in future, and love, praise, and serve thee with all the greater fervor. Amen.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE NECESSITY AND NATURE OF SORROW FOR SIN.

"*Go, show yourselves to the priests.*" Luke 17 : 14.

There is no other means to cleanse your souls from the leprosy of mortal sin, and receive forgiveness from the God whom you have offended, but to "show yourselves to the priests," to examine your consciences with candor, and to confess your sins fully. But wait a little. The examination of conscience and confession of one's sins are, after all, not enough. To-day I shall show you

I. That the most necessary part of the Sacrament of Penance is true sorrow for sin ; and I shall explain to you

II. In what this sorrow consists.

I. Even little children learning the Catechism, know that the chief part of the Sacrament of Penance is sorrow for sin. God is the Lord of all graces, which he distributes as he pleases. Now, he has determined not to forgive sins, under any circumstances, unless the sinner is truly sorry for them. *This is the price for which God is willing to give us pardon.* And that, too, with perfect justice ; for "mortal sin is a turning away from the Creator, and a turning towards creatures." Man, of his own free will, abandons God, whose grace and friendship he despises, and, for the sake of some brutal lust, or temporal gain, or vain honor, attaches his heart to creatures. This is what the Lord complains

of: "Thus saith the Lord: What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity? . . . They have turned their backs on me and not their face" (Jerem. 2 : 5, 27). Therefore, in order to be freed from sin and to recover the grace and friendship of God, the sinner by an act of his free will, must abandon creatures and turn towards his Creator.

1. And what less could God require as an atonement for the insult offered him, than that he by whom he has been offended and abandoned should at least feel grieved and sorry for his crime? It is, then, an undoubted fact that God will not pardon sin, either in or out of the Sacrament of Penance, unless the sinner is sorry for what he has done.

2. Sorrow for sin, when it arises from a perfect love of God, is such a powerful means of obtaining forgiveness that it at once justifies the sinner, even without any other means, and makes him a friend of God. In the Old Testament, this perfect sorrow was the only means of obtaining pardon for one who had sinned mortally. In the New Law, if I have no opportunity of confession, through want of a priest, if I make an act of perfect contrition, I am again a friend of God, even if I were the greatest sinner in the world, and the kingdom of heaven belongs to me as my lawful inheritance. Nor is any examen of conscience or of the number and nature of my sins required for this. It is enough if I am heartily sorry, from a motive of perfect charity, for having offended God. Even when I have an opportunity of confessing my sins, and intend availing myself of it, the moment I make this act of perfect sorrow, before I receive absolution, or tell my sins to the priest, or even examine my conscience, all my sins are at once forgiven, although the obligation of confessing those sins and receiving sacramental absolution for them, still remains, because the law of God requires it. From this alone it is evident that contrition is the most necessary condition to ensure

forgiveness for sin; for, if all other means fail, it alone has the power of fully reconciling us to God.

3. The same necessity is still more evident from the fact that without this sorrow all other means are useless to obtain pardon of sin. You may have spent a whole year in examining your conscience, and searching out its most hidden recesses, and writing out all your sins with their number, nature, and circumstances; you may have confessed all those sins with the greatest candor and humility, and with great shame and mortification on your part, to a most learned, experienced, and pious priest. He may have given you sacramental absolution and all imaginable indulgences as well, that it is in his power to give. You may have performed your penance, and done other voluntary penitential works besides. But if true sorrow alone is wanting, then all your labor is vain. Not one of your sins is forgiven ; you are not absolved from them ; you are, as you were before, a child of reprobation, an object of the divine malediction. Even the Baptism of water, although it has the power of cleansing the soul from all stain of sin, and all punishment due to sin (so that, if one died immediately after having properly received it, he would go at once to heaven), even that cannot help an adult who has sinned grievously to obtain forgiveness, unless he first hates and detests his sins by an act of at least imperfect sorrow. Such is the teaching of the Council of Trent. Therefore neither examen of conscience, nor confession, nor absolution, nor satisfaction, nor penance, nor holy Baptism itself in the case of an adult, nor all the other means that God has appointed for the forgiveness of sin are of the least use, if true sorrow for sin be wanting.

4. Its indispensable necessity for the sinner is evident from the fact that there is nothing which can replace it or do its work. If, through inexperience, or inculpable ignorance, one has not properly examined his conscience, so that he has forgotten many grievous sins, provided he has otherwise done his best according to his ability, his sins will nevertheless be forgiven; for the goodness

of God will take his inexperience and ignorance into consideration, and will make good his defects. Again, if through the same causes he has not confessed all his sins, without any fault on his part, provided he has otherwise done his best to prepare for confession, his sins will be forgiven him, the absolution he receives will be valid; for his ignorance excuses him, and he is bound to nothing further than to confess those sins the next time he goes to confession, if he remembers them. If he has not received absolution validly, either because the priest is not properly authorized, or because the priest, through wickedness, has not had the proper intention when giving absolution, nevertheless, if he has a perfect sorrow for his sins, God himself will absolve him; or else, if his sorrow is imperfect, he can be absolved by another priest, the next time he goes to confession. If he has unwillingly forgotten his penance, or has not been able to perform it, he is no worse for that. The guilt of sin is taken away from his soul; for his incapacity excuses him. Nay, if through weakness or illness, one cannot examine his conscience,nor declare his sins in confession,nor fulfil the penance enjoined him, provided he has the will to confess, even by signs, and has at the same time a true sorrow for sin, he can receive absolution, and his sins will be forgiven. Thus, all these parts of the Sacrament of Penance may be supplied in some way or other, if in certain circumstances any of them be wanting.

But with regard to sorrow for sin the matter is quite different. It is so absolutely necessary, that without it, not a single sin will be forgiven. If one who has committed a mortal sin is so simple as to believe that it is enough for him to declare his sins in confession, even if he has never heard anything of sorrow for sin, and knows not how to excite it,—his inculpable ignorance does not excuse him. He is in the state of sin, and he remains in it. Another would willingly make an act of sorrow, but he cannot, on account of weakness and inability. His illness does not excuse him, and if he dies without that sorrow, although he may have received a thousand absolutions, he will be lost forever, and there is no help for him. Thus there is neither inexperience,

nor ignorance, nor weakness, nor illness, nor indulgence, nor jubilee, nor priestly absolution, nor anything in the world that can dispense me from having true sorrow for my sins, or replace it, if it is wanting. If I have offended God by mortal sin, and die without truly repenting of it, whether wilfully, or through inculpable ignorance, or through some cause that I could not prevent, —I am lost forever, not, indeed, on account of not having true sorrow for my sin, but on account of the sin I have committed and have not annulled by true repentance (unless I make an act of perfect charity, for that includes a perfect sorrow for sin, and therefore is able to justify the sinner even outside the Sacrament of Penance). In the same way, a child who dies without being baptized before it comes to the use of reason cannot go to heaven, even if an attempt were ignorantly made to administer Baptism with white wine instead of water. The necessary Baptism being wanting, the child cannot have any share in the happiness of heaven.

From this we can conclude that our greatest care and diligence, when going to confession, should be devoted to exciting in ourselves a true sorrow and repentance for sin, even when we have nothing but venial sins and daily shortcomings to accuse ourselves of. If we have not a mortal sin on our conscience, it would be better for us to go to holy Communion without confession, than to confess without true sorrow. For, as I have often said already, I am never bound to confess venial sins; but if, nevertheless, I wish to confess them (and it is a good and useful thing to do) and have nothing else but venial sins, then I must necessarily make an act of true sorrow for all, or for one at least, otherwise I profane the holy Sacrament, and the absolution I receive is invalid, on account of the want of one of the necessary parts of the Sacrament. Hence it may be that of two persons who go to confession one may come out justified, although his conscience was burdened with a hundred mortal sins, because he has prepared properly for confession and has had a true sorrow for his sins; while the other, who was before pious and just, and had only venial sins to confess,

comes out in the state of mortal sin, because he was wanting in true contrition, through his own fault. Therefore, I repeat, that they who go frequently to confession and have nothing to accuse themselves of but venial sins and daily faults would do well to confess in general terms some sin of their past lives, for which they can easily make an act of contrition, so as not to expose the Sacrament to the danger of being invalidly received.

But alas, that true sorrow and repentance for sin, which is most requisite for the forgiveness of sin, is also unfortunately that in which most penitents are wanting! How many there are who imagine that, when they have examined their consciences accurately, and declared all their sins in confession, they have done quite enough? They have not the least doubt that their confessions are good. They hardly think of having the proper sorrow for sin, their only anxiety being not to leave out anything in confession. Again, you will find hundreds who are anxious and troubled after confession; and why? Ah, they think, have I left out anything? I wish I could be certain that I have told all my sins. But amongst the hundreds, you will hardly find one who will be scrupulous as to whether he has had the proper sorrow for sin.

I will say nothing of those Christians whose mode of life sufficiently declares that they do not believe in the necessity of sorrow for sin, and who think that all they have to do is to tell their sins to the priest in order to be forgiven. For when they are assailed by temptation, and the opportunity is offered them, they fall into sin head foremost, without scruple or fear, and then say to others, or at least think to themselves: "After all, what harm is there in what I have done? I can tell it in confession, and it will be all right." Yes, I readily believe that, if confession alone were required, one who has little fear of God might be more daring in offending him. But confession is not enough; you must also detest your sins more than all other imaginable evils. Do you believe that? If you do, is it not a foolish thing for you to think or say: "I will satisfy my passion now; I will say or do this sinful thing, and then I can confess it afterwards"? That is just as

senseless as if I were to say: "There are many clever surgeons in this town who can heal all kinds of wounds ; I will therefore throw myself down from the top of a high wall, and break my limbs to pieces ; I shall be sorry for having done so afterwards, but I can go to one of those doctors and he will cure me !" The fact is, you do not believe in the necessity of true contrition for your sins, which you commit so freely ; or else you do not understand what is meant by this contrition, so that, if you always confess in that way, you will never have a true sorrow and repentance. For my part, out of a hundred bad confessions, I believe that ninety-nine are bad through want of true sorrow.

II. The nature of true contrition.

"Contrition," says the Council of Trent, "is the sorrow of the mind which detests its sins and aspires to a better life." Hence, true contrition does not consist in the words that are spoken by the mouth, or read out of a prayer-book, no matter how earnest or expressive they may be; nor does it consist in sighs or tears, nor in the sadness that is experienced in the sensitive part of the soul. These outward manifestations of grief are good and praiseworthy; they are sometimes the effect of a supernatural sorrow. Real contrition does not consist in them, nor are they always infallible signs of it ; otherwise, the wicked king Antiochus, the traitor Judas, and others like them, would have had true sorrow for their sins, for they wept on account of them ; nor would the penitent David have had true sorrow when he said, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2Kings 12 : 13), in which passage we do not read of his having shed tears, and yet he was immediately assured, in the name of God, by the prophet Nathan, that his sins were forgiven. Those people are greatly mistaken who make sensible efforts to force out tears and sighs, to the great detriment of their health; and if they succeed in doing so, imagine they have true contrition. Others think they have not true sorrow because they do not feel a palpitation of the heart, or some other sign of bodily excitement, or because they do not experience as bitter or

as sensible a sorrow as they would feel at the death of their parents, children, or friends.

Understand this, dear Christians, sorrow for sin is not a natural and sensible affection of the sensitive part of our nature, but a supernatural, spiritual affection of the reasoning soul ; and it consists partly in a movement of sorrow in the understanding, and partly in an earnest retractation and condemnation in the will. In the first place, when the sinner's conscience represents his sins to his memory, and he, enlightened by faith, has thought of what a great, almighty, all-seeing God, worthy of all love, he has despised, and of what a loving Father and sovereign Benefactor he has offended ; of how he has inflicted eternal death on his own precious soul for the sake of some miserable, momentary pleasure, and sacrificed heaven and everything that is good, exposing himself to the danger of being buried in hell forever, then his understanding is enabled to see, to his secret confusion, that he has indeed acted wrongly and foolishly. Am I not, he thinks to himself, foolish, presumptuous, ungrateful, and wicked, to have committed sin ? This knowledge and sorrow on the part of the understanding are followed by a resolution and repentance on the part of the will, by which he hates, condemns, and, as it were, retracts the evil he knows he has done, and wishes heartily he had never done it. Ah, he says to himself in all sincerity, would that I had never done it! If it were to be done again, I would rather die a thousand times than be guilty of it ! Now, if this sorrow of his arises from the fact that he is grieved at having offended and insulted God, whom he now loves above all things on account of his infinite perfections, then it is perfect contrition, and can blot out sin even outside the Sacrament of Penance. But if it is caused by his grief at having offended God, who has been so good to him, or who can shut heaven against him, or condemn him to hell, then it is an imperfect contrition, which is sufficient to obtain forgiveness of sin in the Sacrament of Penance. You see now, that all this is not necessarily an affection of the senses or of the body, nor a matter of words or printed forms, but that it resides in the mind and in

the soul. Nor does it need to be entertained a long time. If it be sincerely entertained in the heart even for a moment, it suffices to obtain the forgiveness of sin. I say that it must be sincerely entertained. My sorrow for sin must be so sincere that I must be disposed, no matter what circumstances arise, to prefer any evil rather than offend God by mortal sin.

Christians, have we always that earnest resolve when we are exciting ourselves to sorrow for sin before confession? Have you got it, who recite a whole catalogue of mortal sins in confession, and then repeat by heart the formula: "I am sorrow for all these sins, because I have thereby offended God," while you hardly bestow a thought on the meaning of those words? The same I say to you who come to confession with a great number of mortal sins, and never show any signs of amendment from one confession to another. And to you also, who continue in the proximate occasion of sin, in impure intimacy, in hatred and enmity, in drunkenness, in the filthy habit of cursing and swearing, in following the unlawful customs of the world, and in the possession of ill-gotten goods. Are you all firmly resolved to detest your sins above every other evil? Do you seriously wish you had never committed them? How is that possible? Your sorrow is only a lip-sorrow; it does not touch the heart, and therefore it is only an apparent, invalid, and sacrilegious sorrow, which adds to your sins instead of taking them away. I repeat what I have said already, out of a hundred bad confessions, ninety-nine (generally speaking), are invalid through a defect of true sorrow.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

TWO ESSENTIALS OF TRUE SORROW FOR SIN.

"*No man can serve two masters.*" Matt. 6: 24.

There are many so-called penitent Christians in the world who try to prove our Lord a liar. "No man can serve two masters," he has said; but these people wish to serve the world and God at the same time; they wish to serve God, and also their rebellious flesh; they wish to give themselves partly to God, and partly to the devil. This is chiefly their case when they are preparing for confession. There are some sins they wish to drive out of their hearts; others, that they cling to tenaciously. Or else, if they repent of all their sins, it is not from a supernatural motive. But they are attempting an impossibility; "No man can serve two masters." There are two essentials to a true sorrow for sin, which I shall now proceed to explain to you.

True contrition must

I. Be extended to all the mortal sins that one has committed, without a single exception; and

II. It must spring from God, that is, from a supernatural motive.

I. He who wishes to be a true Catholic must believe all that the Catholic Church teaches. The word of God is as infallible in one article of faith as it is in another. If I refuse to believe him in one point, I cannot believe anything he says. The same may be said of one who repents of his sins. He is not sorry for any of his mortal sins, if he is not sorry for all. If I sincerely detest a single mortal sin because it closes heaven against me and exposes me to the eternal flames of hell, I must also detest every mortal sin, because they all entail the loss of heaven and the pains of hell. If I detest one mortal sin because, in committing it, I have offended God, who is so good to me, I have the same reason for detesting all mortal sins. If I detest a mortal sin because I thereby have

grieved Jesus Christ, my Saviour, who has loved me so much that he suffered death for me, I have the same cause to detest all mortal sins. If I detest a mortal sin because I have thereby despised God, who is worthy of all honor and love, the same motive should impel me to hate all sin, or else my repentance is not sincere.

Even if I detested one certain mortal sin, on account of its special deformity and loathsomeness, and felt no sorrow for the rest of my mortal sins, God requires of me, if I wish to regain his grace and friendship, and make a valid confession, that I should hate and repent of all the mortal sins I have committed, and that, too, with my whole heart. All must be forgiven together, or else none at all. God will not make friendship with the sinner until the latter has subscribed to all the required conditions. All that God hates must be given up and destroyed. "Be converted and do penance for *all* your iniquities, and iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which you have trangressed" (Ezech. 18 : 30, 31), all without exception; for, if you allow a single one of them to remain on your conscience, you will assuredly die the death of the sinner. What would it avail me to shed bitter tears for a hundred grievous sins, if my heart and will still remained attached to but a single one? Hell is full of unfortunate sinners who are lost through a single bad habit, a single vice, to which they were addicted during their lives. How, then, can I expect to obtain pardon, if I repent of one sin and not of all?

God commanded Samuel to say to Saul, "Go and smite Amalec, and utterly destroy all that he hath; spare him not, nor covet anything that is his; but slay both man and woman, child and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (1Kings 15 : 3). Saul obeyed, but not fully, as God had commanded him. He cut and burnt, and hacked and slew; but whom and what? "All the common people," says the Holy Scripture, "he slew with the edge of the sword. And Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the flocks of sheep and of the herds, and the garments and the rams, and all that was beautiful, and would not

destroy them" (Ibid. 8 : 9). He kept for himself what was of any use to him, "but everything that was vile and good for nothing, that they destroyed" (Ibid. 9). And therefore he received from Samuel the sad news that God had deposed him from his throne, and rejected him, because he did not destroy everything according to the command of the Lord. "For as much, therefore, as thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected thee from being king" (Ibid. 23). Here we have a striking picture of the conduct of many Christians when they are preparing for confession. After the fashion of Saul, they repent of and detest the sins that do not excite strong desires in them, from which they expect no special profit or pleasure, and which are not difficult to avoid. These they sacrifice to the divine justice. "All the common people he slew with the edge of the sword ;" but what becomes of the king ? what of the more important and attractive transgressions ? "Saul spared Agag . . . and all that was beautiful." That is what these sinners do. All that is pleasing to the senses, and that has long captivated their hearts, is spared. That unlawful, scandalous intercourse with that wicked companion; that proximate occasion of sin, which one does not wish to leave ; that long-standing hatred and enmity; those ill-gotten possessions; those habits of drunkenness and intemperance, the occasion of so many sins; those scandalous abuses, the occasion of sin to others, these are the king Agag whose life is saved ; these are kept uninjured in the heart, in the inclination, and in the desires; these sins are not repented of, because there is no serious intention of avoiding them.

Hear what the Lord God says: "But if the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed, and keep all my commandments . . . living he shall live, and shall not die; I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done" (Ezech. 18: 21, 22). "Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord" (Lam. 2: 19). And why not like oil or balsam ? No; for oil or balsam cannot be poured out of a glass so that none of it remains sticking to the sides of the vessel, while water, on the contrary, may

be poured out at once almost to the last drop. Sinner, when you go to confession, "Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord," so that not one of your sins remains unrepented of. But contrition must not only be universal. It must also

II. Proceed from a supernatural motive.

That which impels us to sorrow for our sins must come from faith. A few examples will serve to make this clear. Pharao, Saul, Antiochus, Judas, all confessed and expressed their sorrow for their sins. But what good did their repentance do them? None at all. In spite of it, they were lost forever. On the other hand, king David sinned, and that, too, in consequence of the greater lights he enjoyed, more grievously than those others, when he committed the crimes of adultery and murder. "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Kings 12: 13), said he to the prophet Nathan. That was all the proof he then gave of his repentance, and yet the prophet said to him at once: "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (Ibid.). Magdalene came into the presence of our Lord, and cast herself down at his feet. Whereupon, she had the happiness of hearing from his own divine lips, the words: "Many sins are forgiven her" (Luke 7: 47). Peter denied his Master most shamefully three times; but he began to weep immediately after, and not another word was said of his sin. The thief on the cross, who probably had not done a good act during his whole life, only said to Christ the words: "Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom" (Ibid. 23: 42), and at once, the eternal kingdom was promised him: "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise"(Ibid. 43).

Whence is this difference? In the eyes of men, says St. Augustine, there was no difference between the repentance of the former and that of the latter; but the divine Judge, who sees the secrets of the heart, did not look at the matter as we do. Pharao was afraid that still greater plagues would fall upon him, as Moses had threatened in the name of God; and therefore he repented of his disobedience. Saul was anxious to retain the crown, and when

Samuel told him that he would lose it for his sin, he repented at once. Antiochus was afraid of death, and hoped to be freed from the intolerable stench of his illness, for he was being eaten alive by worms. Therefore, he wept and acknowledged God as his supreme Lord. Judas could not bear the tortures of a bad conscience, which brought him, not to a true supernatural contrition, but to the extremity of despair. Hence, none of those sinners found grace and mercy from God.

O Christians, of what kind is *your* sorrow for sin? I have sinned; I repent of my sins, and am sorry for them. That is what all sinners say; and many of them are indeed sorry that they have sinned, and would wish never to have committed a sin; but what is the motive of their sorrow? What makes them shed tears of repentance? Is it because they have offended the Almighty God, who is infinitely good and worthy of all love? Ah, I am afraid that is what most of them think the least of! Some temporal object or natural fear and anxiety, or misfortune, or the dread of disgrace before the world; such are the motives that induce them to detest what they have done against the law of God. It is not the offence offered to God, but their own misery and trials that they deplore; their sorrow is not supernatural; and, in fact, such people are the least capable of being moved to true contrition for their sins, because their hearts are fully occupied with their natural grief, and their minds are too disturbed to admit of good thoughts.

My dear Christian, your motive for repenting of and detesting your sins must be far different, if you wish to regain the grace and friendship of God in the Sacrament of Penance. Represent to yourself by faith what a great, powerful, good, merciful God you have despised by your sins; the immense loss you have caused your soul to suffer; the punishment, the eternal flames of hell, that you have merited in the next life, and then you will have reason enough to deplore your sins with true, interior sorrow. When you are going to confession, let faith speak to your heart in silent meditation, as Nathan spoke to David, when the latter was still

in the state of sin and had forgotten God, in order to move him to repentance: "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; I anointed thee king of Israel" (2 Kings 12 : 7). Think of what you were a few years ago, a poor little boy, running about barefooted, the least amongst your brethren, who had nothing to hope for but what you could earn by the sweat of your brow ; a poor shepherd boy, ill clad, you were glad when you had bread enough to eat. And I have given strength to your arms, that you might slay the fierce lion ; I enabled you to overthrow the mighty giant, and to put his army to flight ; and finally, out of sheer mercy and good-will to you, I have raised you to the throne. Is not that so ? Yes, David was obliged to confess, it is quite true. "I delivered thee from the hand of Saul"(Ibid.). Do you remember how you fared at the court of that king ? How he often tried in his madness to pierce you with his spear, and how he pursued you everywhere with his army, seeking to kill you ? Who helped you in those difficulties ? Who protected you and saved you from the hands of your enemy ? It was I, as you know very well. "And I gave thee thy master's house"(Ibid. 8). The splendid palace in which you now live, the gardens that surround it, the treasures which you possess in such abundance, whom did all those things belong to a few years ago ? To Saul, your master. And I have taken them from him, in order to bestow them on you, who never expected to be raised to such dignity and wealth. "Why, therefore, hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do evil in my sight ? Thou hast killed Urias the Hethite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife" (Ibid. 9). Have I deserved that from you ? When I placed the crown on your head, was that the time for you to trample my commandments under foot ? When I raised you from out of obscurity, was it right of you to make me your foot-stool ? Ungrateful mortal, how have you dared to treat me thus ?

When you are preparing for confession, you should imagine that God is speaking to you in the same manner ; that he says to you, I have created you. A few years ago, you were nothing ; I

could have left you in the abyss of your nothingness. I have chosen you in preference to countless others, whom I might have created, and have drawn you forth from that abyss, and made you to my image and likeness ; your soul and body, your understanding, memory, health, skill, good name, and temporal support,—all that you have and are, are benefits that you have received from me ; and I have given them to you without any merits on your part. In preference to many thousand others, I have called you to the true faith, given you my Flesh and Blood as the food of your soul, and preserved you from many dangers of soul and body. Often, when you had sinned mortally, I could have hurled you into hell, where many are burning now who have committed less sin than you. While you were actually in the state of sin, I have had the greatest patience with you, although I could have inflicted eternal punishment on you, at any moment. "Why, therefore, hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do evil in my sight?"

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE NATURE OF A PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT.

"*He that was dead sat up, and began to speak.*" Luke 7: 15.

In the Gospel of to-day we have incontrovertible proofs that the dead son of the widow of Naim was really restored to life by our Lord : "He that was dead sat up," and, that no one might think it was a delusion, "he began to speak," as if to say to the people who were standing round: "See ! I can move; I can speak to you ; I am restored to life !" Would to God, that all sinners whose souls are dead, might thus surely recover the life of sanctifying grace in the Sacrament of Penance ! Would to God, that

the amendment of their lives always proved the truth of their resurrection! But how many are deluded on this point! How many are there of whom, when they come out of the confessional, we might say with truth in the words of the Gospel of to-day. "Behold, a dead man is carried out"? Dead he went in, and dead he comes out. His repentance is only an apparent one. This occurs either through culpably omitting a grievous sin in the examen of conscience, or through want of a true supernatural sorrow for sin, or else through want of a firm purpose of amendment, which is the third requisite to a good confession. Of the nature of this purpose learn, to-day, my brethren,

I. That he who desires to possess the life of grace in the Sacrament of Penance must have a firm purpose of avoiding mortal sin; and

II. That he must have a firm purpose of avoiding all mortal sins for all time.

I. True contrition does not consist in mere words, nor in sighs and tears, but in an act of the will by which I hate and detest them all from a supernatural motive, and wish from my heart that I had never committed them. The purpose of amendment that I make in presence of God and of my confessor does not consist in mere words, but in an earnest and present determination of my will, from a supernatural motive, not to commit again a single mortal sin in any way whatever, for the sake of any person, pleasure, or profit, and to use all the necessary efforts to carry out this determination. If this firm purpose is wanting, repentance is of no avail, confession is useless, and the absolution received is invalid. The Council of Trent says: *True repentance requires not merely a detestation of one's sins, but also a firm purpose of amending one's life.*

But, alas! of the numbers who go to confession, how few there are who make this earnest attempt to amend their lives! "I firmly purpose to avoid all sin, and to amend my life," such are the words many sinners utter with the mouth; but what do their

hearts say? Ask your own conscience. Do you not often think, when saying those words: "I shall never be able to do as I say; I cannot give up this or that"? "I will amend," says the mouth. "But," thinks the heart: "I cannot look favorably on that man whom I have long borne hatred to, much less, can I say anything good about him." "I will amend," says the mouth. "But," thinks the heart; "when difficulties arise at home I will not abstain from cursing and swearing." "I will amend," says the mouth. "But, next Sunday, as usual," says the heart: "I will go to the ale-house, and get drunk." "I will amend," says the mouth. "But if I happen to be in that person's company, which is very likely to be the case," says the heart: "I will not abstain from taking impure liberties." Has he a firm determination of the will who knows in his conscience, that he does not intend keeping his promises of amendment? His purpose consists rather in mere desires, which, like the weather-cock on the steeple, turn round in every direction, according to the wind, but, nevertheless, are not to be moved from their place. Such a sinner would like to avoid sin, but at the same time to gratify his wicked passions. He would like to love God above all things, with his whole heart, and at the same time to place no restraint on his love for creatures. He would like to enter on the way to heaven, and still to keep on the broad path that leads to hell. "The sluggard willeth, and willeth not" (Prov. 13 : 4), says the Wise Man. It is not enough to say: "I would like to do it." You must say, "I *will* do it; I am in earnest about it; I will make use of the proper means." It is useless for the merchant to sit idle in his shop, saying: "I would like to be rich!" or in the soldier to run away from the fight, saying: "I would like to gain the victory"; or for the student to shut up his books and waste his time, saying: "I would like to be at the head of my class!" All this "would like" is not of the least help to them. The merchant must labor, the soldier must fight, the student must study earnestly, if they wish to succeed. Hell is filled with such fruitless wishes and desires, which, if they were capable of restoring a sinner to the state of grace, would soon

convert the abode of death into the mansion of life, and the prison of the damned into a paradise of joys. Sinner, are you in earnest about being converted and doing penance? Then you must say from your heart, with the penitent David; "I said: Now have I begun" (Ps. 56 : 11); I am fully determined to avoid all sin, and to amend my life. Now I have begun; the change for the better has already commenced. Ah, (you think), if I only could do that! You should rather say: If I only wished to do it. You do not wish to do it, and there the fault lies. We read in the Gospel of St. Luke that the guests who were invited to the feast "began all at once to make excuse." The first said: "I have bought a farm, and must needs go out and see it." Another said: "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to try them;" but the third made it appear an utter impossibility for him to go: "I have married a wife, and therefore, I cannot come" (Luke 14 : 18, 19, 20). But St. Matthew, who relates the same parable in a different manner, gives, in a few words, the true cause of their remaining away, and shows that their excuses were worthless: "*They would not come*" (Matt. 22 : 3), he says. Thus he gives us to understand, that the excuses we allege for not amending our lives, and which are founded on our weakness, or evil inclinations, or on temptations, habits, and necessity, are referred by the all-seeing God to the one chief cause, "they would not come." They do not amend, because they do not wish to amend. They do not abstain from cursing, drunkenness, hatred, injustice, and impurity, because they do not wish to abstain. In a word, the earnest purpose is wanting to them.

Ah, what can we not do to secure some temporal gain, to prevent some outlay of money, because we are in earnest about it! How readily we overcome ourselves, and what difficulties we are ready to face! If sinners would only give a penny to some poor person whenever they curse or swear, or send some money to a charitable institution when they fall into their accustomed sins, I am sure that in a short time they would find a great change for the better; and they would have to acknowledge, that they were un-

able to amend hitherto because they had no wish to amend, and that, as they were wanting in this firm purpose, their confessions were invalid.

Others who flatter themselves that they have a firm purpose of amendment while, in reality, they are always running from one confessor to another, looking for a priest who never gives them a word of advice; who knows not the state of their conscience; who is ignorant of the length of time they have been subject to their bad habits, and who, not being aware that they are in the proximate occasion of sin, cannot remind them of their duty in that respect. Again; the same grievous sins of which you now accuse yourself, you have often confessed before; and you have been confessing them for the last six, seven, or eight months, or even for the last two or three years, or longer. After all that time, you are just as much addicted to vice as before. How is it possible, how can any sensible man imagine, that you ever had a sincere purpose of amendment, since there is not the least sign of any improvement in you? If a man is really resolved to avoid a certain thing, he can easily find means to carry out his intention. If you are determined not to fall into the mud, you know how to avoid the stone over which you stumbled before. The proverb says: "Even the stupid ass does not stumble twice over the same stone." If, once or twice you scald a dog that you wish to drive out of your kitchen, you will find that he will not come back again. But you return for the third, sixth, or twentieth time, with the same sins on your conscience, after having fallen over the same stone, or been scalded with the same water. Who can believe that your purpose of amendment was anything more than empty words, to which you did not attach the least meaning? "He is a scoffer, and not a penitent," says St. Augustine, "who still does what he repents of."

St. John Chrysostom calls such repentance, "theatrical penitence," because it is like a stage-scene in a comedy. Have you not sometimes seen a fight represented on the stage? The combatants rush at each other with drawn swords and with every appear-

ance of rage and fury ; at last, one of them falls to the ground, stretches out his hands, and seems quite lifeless. A child, who does not understand what is going on, begins to cry at seeing the man fall dead ; but his father, who is sitting beside him, easily reassures him, and explains to him that it was only a sham fight, and that the man will soon come to life again. Later on, the same man who pretended to be dead, comes on the stage again in a different character. "See," the father says to his child, "there is the man ! Do you not recognize him ? When the play is over, the pretended dead man goes home and eats, and drinks, and amuses himself with his family just as before." Like this is the apparent repentance of many who go to confession. They throw themselves down on their knees, praying, sighing, and striking their breasts, and saying to themselves : "I am heartily sorry for having offended God, and I will never sin again !" So much they say with their lips, and then they go to the priest and receive absolution. Those who cannot see the heart would say of such : "Surely, there is now an end of sin ! Here is every sign of true sorrow !" But alas, God thinks differently. The consciences of those people are still burdened with sin as before. How do we know that ? Have a little patience and in a short time you will see the apparent penitent returning to his former evil ways ; a sure sign that he has not had an earnest purpose of amendment ; for where there is no amendment, there has been only a useless repentance.

I do not mean to say that it is always an infallible sign of an inefficacious purpose for one to relapse into the same sins. Past sins, (even grievous ones), may be committed again, after some time, or under the pressure of a great temptation or occasion. Our wills, alas, are inconstant and changeable, so that to-day we may be honestly determined to do the will of God, and to-morrow, quite differently disposed. What I say, holds good chiefly of those who spend months and years in the same vices, showing no sign of amendment from one confession to another, and making no use of the proper means to correct their bad habits. Of such people I say that they have not a firm purpose of amendment, no

matter what they say to the contrary in confession, for their actions contradict their words. Hence, *there must be an earnest determination to avoid all sin.*

II. There must be a firm purpose to avoid all sin *for all time and under all circumstances.* God accepts no temporary armistice; if you wish to be reconciled to him, you must declare with him a peace which is to last forever. You must be resolved at the present moment never again to commit a single mortal sin, under any circumstances whatever. At the present moment, I say; for your purpose (no matter how strong it may be), cannot keep you from sinning in the future; but your will must be so disposed that you are firmly determined as long as your good purpose lasts, that mortal sin shall be incompatible with it; and if it lasted for eternity, it would be impossible for you ever to commit a mortal sin. God wishes to make a lasting peace with you; he will not be satisfied with half of your heart. In virtue of your purpose, you must be firmly resolved to avoid all the proximate occasions of sin, to overcome all bad desires and inclinations, and to fulfil all the obligations that arise from sin. If you have not a firm resolution to that effect, your purpose is of no use, and your confession is invalid.

There are many who purpose to avoid sinful acts, yet retain their evil desires and inclinations. As a sick man, who abstains from certain articles of food and drink, solely because the physician obliges him to do so, meanwhile, eagerly desires the forbidden meats; so, would-be penitents often hunger after their past excesses and rejoice secretly in the recollection of past forbidden pleasures which they have only abandoned perforce. They wish they had made more use of the opportunities formerly offered them of indulging their passions; they regard as happy those who still gratify themselves in that way. They wish that it were not forbidden, but lawful, to indulge in such pleasures; and they are so disposed, that, if there were no hell, they would sin without scruple. They do not fear sin, nor offending God, but solely hell-fire. This being

a mere slavish fear, which does not fully exclude the will to commit sin, therefore, does not suffice for a true conversion. Nay, to be thus disposed,to say,for instance, if impurity were not forbidden under pain of hell, I would commit it, is a new mortal sin; because it is a purpose of offending God if there were no hell, as well as a real complacency in and desire for the sinful action. O sinner, how can you thus treat your good God? You give him your heart as you would give your money to a cut-throat who threatens your life. "Here," you say, "take all my money, but spare my life!" while you think in your heart that, if he had not a dagger pointed at your throat, you would be very far from parting with your purse so easily. "Here," you say to God, "here is my will and the assurance of my obedience; I must obey thee and abandon sin; but if I had not hell to fear, if I could live forever, then I know what I should do!" Away with such purposes of amendment! They are of no avail to the forgiveness of sin!

They do not completely abandon sin who do not give up the proximate occasions and results of sin: I mean, those ill-gotten gains, those improper intimacies, all those things which have been a scandal and a frequent cause of sin to themselves and others. Some men, not satisfied with the sins they commit themselves, leave, as it were, an inheritance of sin to their descendants. So, an unchaste man, who cannot any longer gratify his passions, dies; but he leaves behind him bad books, lewd pictures, and statues enough to corrupt the living. A vindictive man dies; but he leaves behind him a legacy of hatred stamped in the memories of his children, by his oft repeated expressions of rancor against his enemy. An avaricious man dies ; but he leaves to his heirs a load of unjust and usurious gains that is sufficient to damn them. All these people make bad confessions; their sorrow is useless, their purpose vain, the absolution they receive invalid!

What a blessing it would be, what a consolation for the confessor, what a splendid proof of an earnest purpose of amendment, if the penitent could always say with truth: "Father, I am seriously resolved to amend, and, in order to prove my sincerity,

here are 'the heads' of my sins. I have wronged my neighbor, but I have made complete restitution. I have the money here that belongs to him. Can you tell me how to restore it without exposing my good name?" or, "I have lived in improper intimacy for so long with a certain person; but that person is now gone away, or, I have left the house in which I used to sin;" or, "For some months past I have not spoken a word to one whom I disliked, but we are now reconciled." Oh, what a splendid proof of a sincere resolution to amend! But, alas, that proof is not always at hand! Alas! in that Day of Wrath when the "Written Book shall be produced;" when that great account-book shall be opened, out of which the thoughts, words, and actions of all men shall be judged—how many confessions and absolutions we shall then find rejected by the Judge, although, in the opinion of men, they were valid! Then, we shall see the truth of the words, "Many are called, but few chosen" (Matt. 20: 16), even amongst those who were judged to be repentant sinners.

"Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord" (Lam. 2: 19), is again my conclusion. O sinner, if you wish to be truly converted to God, pour out your heart like water, not like oil, so that no grievous sin may remain in it. Pour out your heart like water, not like money out of a purse And why? If you let your money fall, you can stoop down, and pick it up; but if you pour out water on the ground, it is absorbed by the earth, and you can never recover it. In making your purpose of amendment, pour out with your sins, all the will, desire, or hope of returning to them again, crying out with St. Paul: "For I am sure that neither death nor life . . . nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!" (Rom. 8: 38, 39.) Amen.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE MATTER OF CONFESSION.

"*But they held their peace.*" Luke 14: 4.

To speak when one should be silent is not right and may be the cause of many sins; to be silent when one should speak is also wrong, and may occasion much mischief. There is a time to speak, and a time to be silent. The Pharisees in to-day's Gospel, were silent, not from a good motive, but partly because they knew not what answer to make our Lord, and partly because they did not wish to answer him,—because they were filled with hatred and envy of him. In the Sacrament of Penance, the sinner must not remain silent. Therein he must speak candidly, and humbly acknowledge

I. His sins;

II. His own sins; and

III. All his mortal sins.

I. The necessary matter for the Sacrament of Penance is *sin*, and sin that has been committed after Baptism. Other sins do not belong to confession, and are not capable of sacramental absolution. A Jew or a heathen who is baptized in his old age, although he may have been guilty of every sin that can be committed, cannot make any of those sins the subject of his confession. A Christian who has not committed either mortal or venial sin, cannot receive the grace of the Sacrament of Penance in confession. The priest who would attempt to give absolution to such a man would commit a grievous sin, together with his penitent. Therefore Mary, the Blessed Virgin and Mother of God, who never had the least stain of sin on her soul, could not have received the Sacrament of Penance. From this it follows, that they act inconsistently who, like the Pharisee, instead of confessing their sins,

confess their justices. Such people tell the confessor all about their virtues, their practices of piety, their daily troubles and crosses. Hear what the penitent David says to instruct you on this point: "I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord" (Ps. 31:5). Mark you his "*injustice.*" If you have no more sins to confess promptly make an end of your confession.

Some penitents tell what they have not done. They say: "I do not remember anything in particular; I do not curse, or swear, or steal, or speak badly of others, I do no wrong to any one, and am very careful not to injure my neighbor in any way. I sincerely repent of all my sins," they say at the end. What sins are you sorry for? You have not confessed a single one yet. Have you ever told a lie? "No, Father," is the answer; "it is wrong to lie." Have you done this or that? "God forbid; it would be a sin to do that." And what do you come here for, then? "I come to confess my sins." What? To confess sins you have not committed? Would not he be thought a fool, who would appear against a man in court, saying: "O Judge, I am this man's accuser: I do not know anything particularly bad about him. He has not stolen or committed murder, or wronged any one. But it is for you now to pronounce sentence on him"—?

There are others who, not satisfied with telling their sins, bring in a lot of things that are not matter for confession at all, so that the confessor has need of all his patience to listen to a long string of useless talk. They could, if they wished, tell their sins in a few words, but that does not suit them. They must needs give the whole history of the sin, describe the time and place in which it was committed, what was going on at the time, what was the consequence, what was the cause of it, the manner in which the thing happened. All these things must be told with the utmost minuteness, as if they had learned it off by heart, and wished to say it as children do a lesson. There are many who make mistakes of this kind when confessing sins against holy purity. They imagine that it is necessary to give a whole history of the temptations and allurements that led them into sin. Many, too, when

accusing themselves of sins of anger and impatience describe the crosses and trials they have to bear. Their motive in doing so appears to lessen the malice of their sin, although that does not properly belong to confession.

Do you wish to know what harm you do by your long stories? In the first place, you occasion a loss of precious time, which you could have employed far better for the salvation of your soul. In the second place, you bother your confessor, who has perhaps been already a long time in the confessional; and you are to blame if he is so tired that he is unable to attend properly to the other penitents who come to him. Thirdly, during the time that you waste in unnecessary talk, three or four people might have made their confession, instead of which they have to sit there waiting, and perhaps giving way to angry impatience, instead of exciting themselves to contrition for their sins. Some of them may even get up and go away altogether, thus losing confession and holy Communion. Tell your sins, and listen to the confessor's advice or commands. When that is done, go away and make room for others, who have just as much right as you to confess their sins.

If however, you need special counsel in some case which calls for a somewhat lengthy explanation, choose a time when the priest is not busy. But if many people are waiting for confession, defer asking advice, until some more suitable opportunity. He who goes to confession must confess, not only sins, but also,

II. His own sins.

In this, the tribunal of penance differs from worldly tribunals. The penitent appears in confession as his own accuser, and no one else's. One may sin grievously against his neighbor, and lessen his good name before the priest, in the confessional as well as outside of it, by revealing there the name of his accomplice in a grievous sin. Nothing but Christian charity or the duty of fraternal correction can justify the penitent in disclosing the name of another sinner.

Those err grievously in this point who confess the sins of others, mention the name of the person who led them astray ; or who, when accusing themselves of suspicious and rash judgments, say who it was that gave rise to them. Like Adam and Eve in Paradise, they throw the blame of their sins on others whom they name: "The woman whom thou gavest me to be my companion gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3: 12). This very often happens amongst married people. The husband tells his wife's sins in confession, and the wife, as is more frequently the case, the vices of her husband. In the same way, servants accuse their masters and mistresses, while the latter, in turn, complain of the thefts committed by their servants. There are others who complain of the faults of their brothers and sisters, and of their neighbors, with whom they cannot live in peace. Thus, they make others bear the blame of their curses, of their hatred and anger, of their quarrelling and dissension. But what is the good of it all? Why do you come to confession? Is it to tell other people's sins, or your own? For what do you expect absolution? For the sins of others? Let them tell their own sins. "Let every one prove his own work," says St. Paul, "and so he shall have glory in himself only, and not in another. For every one shall bear his own burden" (Gal. 6: 4, 5). Yes, "bear his own burden" to the confessional. If you relate the sins of your relatives, you bring no grace home with you to the guilty ones; all you do is to lessen the good opinion the priest had of them.

If a man has two birds in a cage, and wishes to let one of them free, how does he manage so as not to lose the other as well? He opens the door carefully, and when the bird he wishes to get rid of is out, he shuts it again at once. In the same way, must you act when you go to confession. You have sometimes two kinds of sin shut up in your memory, your own and your neighbor's; you must open your mouth to tell your own sins, but so carefully that, when you have told them, you shut it again at once, lest a word should escape you about the sins of your neighbor. Finally, you must open your mouth to declare

III. *All your mortal sins.*

All grievous sins must be declared as they are on one's conscience, as well as the number of times they have been committed, (as far as it is known to the penitent) and the circumstances which change the species of the sin. Doubtful sins must be confessed as doubtful, and certain as certain. A rash oath is a sin against the Second Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." But if, in addition, that oath injures one's neighbor, it is a sin against the Seventh Commandment as well, "Thou shalt not steal." If, moreover, the oath is a false one, it is also a sin against the Eighth Commandment: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Thus it is a threefold sin, and must be declared with all its circumstances. The difference of the species of sins is principally to be observed in the matter of impurity; namely, what sort was the sinful act, and whether it was committed with a single or a married person, or with a relation, and in what degree of affinity or consanguinity, or with a person consecrated to God, or with a person of the opposite sex. Even in thought, the nature of the sin can change. It is one thing to have a deliberate pleasure in an impure and unlawful imagination; and another, to entertain a wilful desire, inclination, or purpose to commit an impure act. In the latter case, I must say what was the action that formed the object of my desire, or the person with regard to whom it was formed; for all these circumstances change the nature of the sin of desire. In a word, I am bound to declare all the grievous sins I have committed and have not yet confessed, according to their gravity, and the number of times I have been guilty of them, as far as my conscience, after a diligent and reasonable examination, is aware of them. What I cannot remember without any fault of mine will be forgiven, by the sacramental absolution with what I confess.

Herein many grievous faults are committed, first, through the pious simplicity of those who, in order to leave out nothing, make a certain of a doubtful sin, and even increase the number of their

sins. But you thus declare more than you really have on your conscience, and therefore, your confession is not truthful. Or else, if you cannot remember any particular sins, you accuse yourself in a doubtful way, through sheer ignorant fear and anxiety. "Perhaps I have done that," you say. "Perhaps I have joined in an uncharitable conversation." "Perhaps I have given scandal to others." Would you accuse a man before a worldly tribunal in this way? I accuse Paul: "Perhaps he has committed a theft." Or: "Perhaps, he has killed a man." Who could pronounce a sentence of such a ridiculous accusation? If you have good grounds for doubting whether you have sinned or not, then say to the priest: "I am in doubt as to whether I have consented to temptation in this or that instance."

Others do quite the contrary. They use the word "about" with almost every sin they confess: "I have done that about six times"; "I have cursed about four times"; "I have had bad thoughts about once." What do you mean by that? To say you had them "about once" means that you had them twice or not at all. And as the "about" is appended to nearly every sin, how can the confessor form his judgment concerning what he hears? He must think to himself, either that man does not know the meaning of the word, or he has not carefully examined his conscience, or he does not wish to tell the exact number of times he has sinned. This is especially the case when the "*about*" is added to the confession of mortal sins that are accomplished in outward act. As if, for example, I were to say: "I have committed impurity *about* three times." Grievous sins of that kind are not so easily forgotten, and one can readily remember the number of times he has been guilty of them. If a person were to come to me with the "about,"—especially when the number of sins is small,—I should say to him: "You are not acting honestly with God and your conscience, nor do you wish to declare the exact number of your sins!"

There are others who do not mention the number at all. They say simply: "I have cursed"; "I have been drunk"; "I have sung

impure songs" ; "I have committed impurity." Or else : "I have often spoken impurely" ; "I have often grievously injured my neighbor's character." Thus the poor priest, who, in order not to distract his penitent, has to keep silent till the end, is obliged to tax his memory, and go over the whole thing again, in order to find out the exact number of times the different sins have been committed. Now, if you did not intend to declare what you knew to be the number of your sins, you have made a bad confession, and it would be better for you to have remained away, because you have thus incurred the guilt of a grievous sacrilege. But if you *did* intend declaring the number of your sins as well as you could, why did you not do so without waiting to be asked ? Why should you compel the priest to ask you such a number of troublesome questions ? The same holds good also with regard to those who, when accusing themselves in confession, say : "I have had impure thoughts very often ;" but do not state whether they have consented to them or not, or whether they had a wilful desire or intention of doing anything against holy purity. "But," you ask, "if one does not know anything certain of the number of his sins, what is he to do then ?" My answer is that, in that case, you must declare the number of your sins as far as you have been able to discover it in a diligent examen of conscience. But if one is in the habit of sin (as is the case with those who keep up an impure intimacy), then it is, humanly speaking, impossible to remember all the different times that sin has been committed in thought, desire, word, look, and act, so that it is enough for such a one to say that he has lived in unlawful intimacy with a person for so many months or years, that during that time nearly all his thoughts and desires had reference to the object of his passion, and that he was accustomed to commit sinful actions so often during the day, or the week.

There are others who err through grievous and culpable ignorance, when they rely altogether on the questions put them by their confessor. Amongst these are some who confess nothing except what the priest extorts from them, as it were. Nay, they

sometimes boast afterwards, and say : "The priest was rather sharp with me, but he was not able to find out everything !" Unhappy souls ! Which of you is deceived ? The priest, or you ? Even if the latter succeeded in that way in discovering all your sins, your confession is nevertheless a bad one, if you are determined not to tell your sins as they are on your conscience, without being asked. Christians, do not depend too much on your confessor. Even if he finds out all your sins by his questions, and you had not the intention of declaring them all candidly, that forced confession of yours will help you little to the pardon of your sins. You are bound to repent of your evil disposition, and to confess that you did not intend declaring all your sins, unless the priest asked you about them.

Finally, they who commit the worst fault in this particular are those who, through fear or shame, knowingly conceal a grievous sin in confession. This is a new and a terrible sin, which is the occasion of many bad confessions and unworthy Communions, especially amongst young people. Ah,wretched slaves of Satan ! Why do you go to confession, if you do not wish to get rid of your sin ? Sinner, do you wish to regain the health of your soul, and to escape eternal death ? Then you must declare all your mortal sins in confession ; for, if you conceal one of them wilfully and persistently, your confession is worthless, and there is no hope of eternal life for you. Dear Christians ! I beg of you, make an earnest resolution, saying to yourselves, like that hero who wished to encourage his soldiers to meet the enemy : "Let us either conquer, or die." We must either conquer our shame of candidly declaring all our grievous sins, or else we must die an eternal death. Amen.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE ADVANTAGE OF A GENERAL CONFESSION.

"*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.*"
Matt. 22 : 37.

We cannot truly love God unless we banish sin from our hearts by true repentance and a thorough amendment of life. But alas! how many there are whose penance is only a sham. Whose past confessions have been either invalid or gravely defective! If any one of you has reasonable fears that such has been his or her case, then, there is no better, more useful, or more necessary means to adopt than to make a general confession, either of the whole life, or, at least, of the time that has elapsed since his or her last general confession; for

I. A general confession cleanses the soul from all sin; and hence

II. A general confession is necessary to some souls, and very useful to many.

I. In order to a valid confession and absolution, there must be, on the penitent's part, diligent examination of conscience, supernatural sorrow for sin, a firm purpose of amendment, and, finally, an humble and candid confession of all grievous sins. If any of these requisites be wanting, the Sacrament of Penance will not avail him to forgiveness. He still remains in the state of sin. On the other hand, the better and more perfectly those points are observed, the more will the soul be cleansed, and the greater the graces received in the Sacrament. And those points are never better, more fully, or more earnestly observed than in a general confession.

1. The examination of conscience is then made with far more care and diligence than in one's ordinary preparation for confession. For when one is preparing for a general confession of his whole

life, or of a considerable portion of it, he examines most closely everything that has even the appearance of a sin,so as not to leave out anything that could afterwards make him uneasy. And he is helped in this by a special grace of God, who is wont to assist, by an extraordinary light, the man of good will, who is in earnest about being converted to him with his whole heart.

2. After such a careful examen of conscience, his sorrow for sin is far greater than in his usual confessions, because he has arrived at a clearer knowledge of his misery, his poverty, and the woful abuse he has made of his time. From the knowledge you thus gain by the examination of your whole life, there will arise in you a salutary confusion and a bitter sorrow of heart. You will be filled with shame at the sight of your sins, and with wonder at the infinite mercy of God, who has borne with you so patiently and so long, in spite of your manifold offences. O my God (you will say), I must now acknowledge that my eyes and ears, tongue and hands, and whole body, along with my imagination, memory, understanding, heart, and will, and everything that is in me, have been so many instruments that I have misused to offend thee, my God, who art deserving of all love. Alas, what is to become of me? If one sin is enough to deprive me of heaven and its eternal joys, and to condemn me to the everlasting torments of hell, what sort of a hell have I deserved by the countless sins that now stare me in the face? If thou hast hurled into the depths of hell, from the heights of heaven, millions of the noblest and most beautiful creatures, for a single momentary sinful thought; if, for one sin of disobedience, thou hast turned my first parents out of paradise, and hast, moreover, made the whole world a valley of tears, and afflicted its inhabitants with so many miseries; if there are many souls now in hell who have offended thee by but one mortal sin in their whole life, what sort of punishment must I expect, unless I truly repent? How can I sufficiently praise thy infinite goodness and mercy for not having long since cast me off as I deserved, and for so willingly pardoning me, after having so often

and so grievously offended thee? What can follow from such considerations as these, but sincere sorrow of heart, a thorough detestation and hatred of all sin, and an earnest, zealous love for such a good God?

Oh, how many sins lie hidden in a conscience that is normally in a troubled and disorderly state! Certainly, some of us confess our sins from time to time, but many still remain concealed in the depths which are not brought to light as they should be. The examen of conscience, the sorrow for sin, the purpose of amendment, the candid declaration of our sins, and everything that is required for the purifying of the soul in the holy Sacrament of Penance, is best and most perfectly performed in a general confession.

How many confessions are invalid through some great defect in one of those necessary dispositions! Some are careless in their examen of conscience, even when they have committed mortal sin; or, through culpable ignorance, being in doubt about the malice of certain grievous transgressions, they do not confess them; or they content themselves with reading an act of contrition out of their prayer-books, without having a real supernatural sorrow for sin. In many, the purpose of amendment is not what it should be, since they still remain attached to their old vices, or do not make the necessary restitution, or remain in the proximate occasion of sin, or do not lay aside their hatred against their neighbor, or continue to give scandal and occasion of sin to others, or do not fulfil the duties of their state as they ought to. Of what nature are often the confessions of young people, who frequently commit grievous sin in thought, word, and deed, and yet have not a clear idea of what is meant by supernatural sorrow, a firm purpose of amendment, and the candid declaration of their sins; and who often go to confession merely because they are sent by their parents or teachers? Do they not, in many cases, alas! continue making bad confessions for five, ten, or twenty years, bringing down to old age on their heavily-laden consciences the first mortal sin they committed, along with all the sins that followed it?

II. Hence a general confession is necessary to some souls and very useful to many. Let us not wait till a messenger comes from the other world to warn us of the state of our souls. If, through some grievous error our confessions have been invalid, or if we have good reason to doubt their validity, then a general confession is not only very useful for us, but it is actually necessary for our salvation. The penitent David was such a holy man, that after his conversion, his conscience could not reproach him with a single sin which he had not candidly confessed to the Lord and had not shed bitter tears of repentance for, day and night; yet, he could not rest on account of the fear of having committed some grievous fault, in his youth, through ignorance and want of consideration, and, in order to ease his mind, he had recourse to a general confession. "I will confess against myself," he says, "my injustice to the Lord" (Ps. 31 : 5). "My injustice,"—that is, all my sins. Ah! how much greater reason have not many of us to adopt the same means! This sermon is not intended for scrupulous and over-anxious souls; but rather, for those who have never made a general confession, and who will derive from it a calm of conscience, a greater sorrow of heart for their sins, and a thorough cleansing of the soul.

Let no one try to excuse himself by saying that he has no time for this, that he has other things to attend to; that, such matters are well enough for Religious, but that men of the world cannot devote themselves to it. You have other business to attend to? Is there any business in the world so important as that of your immortal soul, whose eternal happiness perhaps depends on your making a good general confession? Answer me now in the words of the catechism: Why are you in this world? What is the end of your being? Is it to keep your house, or to further your temporal business or occupation? These things, according to the decrees of Providence, are only means to be directed by you to the great end, to the only important business, for which you were created. Christ said to Martha in the Gospel: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things. But one

thing is necessary" (Luke 10 : 41, 42). "But one thing is necessary;" namely, to serve God, to love Him above all things, and thereby, to save your soul and make sure of eternal happiness. Think often of the warning of our Lord : "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. 16 : 26).

The very excuse you allege, that you are burdened with temporal cares, makes a general confession much more useful, nay, even necessary to you. For if business cares so closely occupy your time that you cannot give an exact account of your daily actions, as they are in the sight of God, it is only right that you should set apart a certain time during the year in which to regulate your accounts with God by a general confession. Perhaps you do not even examine you conscience before going to rest each night, as do pious Christians, who fear God and are anxious to save their souls? In all places, at home and abroad, since you have to do with all kinds of people, you are exposed to many occasions and dangers of sin in thought, word, and deed, and you can hardly be expected to come off victor in all those encounters. With a mind full of distractions, you go to confession every three months, or even every month, and perhaps, you have not yet made a general confession. Now, is it not evident that, if you are concerned about the salvation of your soul, the very circumstance you bring forward as an excuse should be an additional motive for you to prepare for a general confession?

"I have no time for it." Ah, God help you! No time for the one thing to which you should devote your whole life! You can spend a whole year in the service of the world, but you cannot spare half a day in examining your conscience and cleansing your soul from the stain of sin? Four times a year, you have your house, its furniture, and even your kitchen utensils cleaned from top to bottom ; but you have no time to give your conscience a thorough purifying? You have time enough to pay and to receive unnecessary visits ; time enough to talk, when you had better keep silent ; time enough to waste in decking out your perishable

body with all sorts of finery, for which you will have to render a strict account at the bar of divine justice ; time enough to spend in amusements and parties, in gambling and in other diversions that will likely supply you with matter for your next confession ; but you have no time to arrange your accounts with God, your future Judge ? no time to place your soul in safety and quiet ? no time to begin a better life ? in a word, no time to secure for yourself an eternity of happiness after this short life ? Away with such excuses !

Divide your life into periods ; from your seventh to your twelfth year ; from your twelfth year to the time when you entered on a permanent state of life, a period during which, generally speaking, most sins are committed, on account of the vehemence of passion and the inconsiderateness of youth ; and finally, from that time to the present. Go through the ten commandments, and see what you have done against them in the different periods. Your confessor will help you in this, if you come to him at a time when he has no other penitents to attend to, (for it is generally better not to make such a confession when there are many people waiting). The sins that you cannot remember after reasonable diligence in the examen of your conscience you are not bound to tell; nor are you expected to be so exact in declaring the number of your sins as in your ordinary confessions, unless you have to make good some fault committed in declaring them. Try it, in God's name, and you will find that it is not such a very difficult matter, after all. You will thank him who advised you to take that step, when you find what peace it will bring your conscience ; and, being completely cleansed from your sins, you will be enabled to begin a new life and to say, with the Apostle: "I live, now not I ; but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2 : 20), whom alone I am resolved to love with all my heart for the remainder of my life! Amen.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE ADVANTAGE OF A GENERAL CONFESSION AS FAR AS THE NEXT LIFE IS CONCERNED.

"*Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee.*" Matt. 9: 2.

In appearing before our Lord the paralytic of to-day's Gospel only sought to recover the health of his body; but, along with that he received something infinitely more valuable, for which he did not even dream of asking, namely, the forgiveness of his sins and the sanctification of his soul. "Be of good heart, son," were the words he heard from our Lord, "thy sins are forgiven thee." O spiritual paralytics! come quickly and appeal to this same good and merciful God. Make known to him, in the holy Sacrament of Penance, the maladies from which you suffer, and beg of him with contrite hearts to help and heal you. Last Sunday I showed that a general confession of one's whole life, or, at least, of the time that has elapsed since the last general confession, is the best means of cleansing one's soul from sin, as far as the past is concerned. As a further encouragement to us to have recourse to this means, I now say,

I. That it is also the best means of placing the soul in safety and security for the next life; and I shall proceed to indicate

II. Who are they that are bound to make a general confession of their whole lives.

I. The true repose, safety and consolation of the soul in this life consist in a good conscience. Our ordinary confessions are special renderings of accounts that we make to God every three months, or month, or fortnight, or week, according as we go to confession frequently or not; and if we have always a true sorrow for sin and a firm purpose of amendment, they are signed by God as valid, and we can be easy in conscience. But whenever one discovers on solid grounds that he has committed some notable

error in one or other of those confessions, in order to allay his doubts and bring repose to his conscience once for all, the best thing he can do is to examine all his former accounts, that is, to make a general examination of his conscience, and a confession, either of the sins of his whole life, or of those he has committed since his last general confession.

In a confession of this kind, one receives a document signed with the Blood of Jesus Christ, to prove that his past accounts are all in good order ; and that, having conscientiously discharged his debts, God will make no further claim on him as far as his past sins are concerned. And even if he forgets some grievous sins in that confession, he is still assured (since he has used all reasonable diligence),that he has done all that is required on his part to repent properly, and, therefore, that he will never again, during his whole life, be bound to confess those sins, or even to think of them.

But how long will that peace of mind last, you may ask ? God help us ! before we have time to look round, we fall into mortal sin again and are just as bad as before. So, what is the good of a general confession ? Do you, then, really think it is of no use? Even suppose that you fall again into sin after your general confession, does that render useless all you have done ? Do you not carefully clean out your kettle, although you know that it will soon become rusty again ? . Will you not sweep out your room, because you know that in a day it will be filled with dust ? You have, at all events, the consolation of knowing that for the remainder of your life, nay, for all eternity, your conscience is purified from the sins of all those past years, and from all anxiety and reasonable doubt concerning them. Is not that consolation enough ? Besides, it is much easier for you to confess, from year to year, the sins you may commit in future. Do you still think a general confession of no use ?

But you say that you have scarcely time to look round, when you fall again into sin. Yes, that may easily be the case after ordinary confessions, in which you have not, perhaps, true sorrow

or a firm purpose of amendment ; but there is not so much danger of it when one, out of a pure desire of being converted to God with his whole heart, makes a general confession, and thereby thoroughly cleanses his conscience. He who is already in the state of sin is not, as a rule, very scrupulous about committing fresh sins ; the next confession, he thinks, will clear them all away. But when the conscience is once thoroughly purified, which is done with greater certainty by a general confession, one is most careful not to sully it again by a mortal sin. God will not allow himself to be outdone in generosity by a creature ; and there are special graces and helps which he gives to him who has been converted with his whole heart. Many experienced souls could bear me out in this by testifying with truth, that for years after their first general confession they did not commit one mortal sin. Many others have been known to declare that during their whole lives they never again fell back into grievous sin. There have been Saints to whom a general confession was the beginning of their heroic sanctity. And Oh, what great consolation is to be derived from it in the hour of death, in that terrible moment, when the command is given to us : "Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live!" (Isai. 38 : 1). I do not doubt for a moment that, when the last hour comes for us, we shall be glad to have got rid of all stain of sin completely by a good general confession ; or, at least, if we have not made one up to that time, we shall certainly wish to make one then. And why do we not do so at once, since we have now a favorable opportunity ? A gentleman who, while still in good health, wished to make a general confession. The priest having questioned him as to his reasons for that determination : "Why do you ask me ?" was the answer : "Must I not die some time or other ? Is not death always hurrying after me ? How do I know when, where, and how it will overtake me? In my last illness, I will have enough to do with my sickness and sufferings, with my children, domestics, and the friends who will visit me ; so that I now wish to take time by the forelock, and

to do with the greatest care that on which my eternal salvation depends, and which I shall probably not be able to attend to in my last moments." Let us all follow the example of this prudent and good Christian. Now, that we are sound in mind and body, let us do what we shall certainly wish to have done on our death-bed, and cleanse our souls from all the sins of our lives by a good general confession; and then, whether death comes soon or late, suddenly or after a long illness, we can meet it bravely and with the assurance of eternal salvation; for it will never find us unprepared. But let us now consider

II. To whom a general confession should be recommended.

1. First, ordinarily speaking, to those who have never made a general confession. It is absolutely necessary for those whose past confessions have been wanting in any important essential: full confession of all mortal sins, supernatural sorrow or firm purpose of amendment. Moreover, he who has for years led a dissolute, sinful life, or has been careless in the divine service, and now feels an inspiration from God to begin a new and a better mode of life, will find that a general confession is not only useful, but even necessary. For others, it is very advantageous, in order to set their consciences more at rest, and give more stability to their good resolutions.

2. Second, should those who have already made with reasonable diligence a general confession of their whole lives repeat that confession? No! Generally speaking, that would not be good for most people, while for some it would be positively injurious, for others very dangerous, and for none necessary.

There are some anxious, melancholy, and scrupulous souls who are never at ease, no matter how often they go to confession. They are always dejected and filled with bitterness of heart. They never can satisfy their uneasy consciences, which are forever racked with an unreasonable doubt, an ever-recurring "perhaps." The more they examine themselves, the more bewildered they

become. For such people a repetition of their general confession would be not only useless, but even highly injurious; it would be for them, not a medicine giving relief, but rather a poison to aggravate their disease. People who have sore eyes, the more they rub them, the worse they become. So with these souls, who when they have once told all their sins in confession, must think of them no more. They should take to heart as specially addressed to themselves, those words of the Wise Man: "Think of the Lord in goodness and seek him in simplicity of heart; for he is found by them that tempt him not; and he showeth himself to them that have faith in him" (Wisd. 1 : 1, 2). As little children allow themselves to be guided by their mothers, so they, too, must follow blindly the advice of their confessor. If he tells them that they are not to make a general confession, although they have never made one, they must obey. If he tells them even not to examine their conscience before confession, they must humbly obey him. And, in fact, if they who suffer from this spiritual malady, do not submit humbly and obediently, without a word of complaint, to their ordinary confessor, they will never recover their spiritual health. Scruples arise from ignorance or from a melancholy disposition, or, as often happens, from the secret pride and obstinacy of those who are unwilling to submit their judgment to people who know more than they do; or else, they may arise from an inscrutable decree of God's Providence, who wishes to make us humble and to withdraw us from the vanities of the world. But from whatever cause scruples arise, the souls that are affected with them can only be cured of them by blind obedience to the confessor.

3. I do not reckon amongst the scrupulous those who lead an idle, useless life, and easily fall into mortal sin, or who are the occasion of others falling into it; nor those who do not try to fulfil their bounden duties and obligations. Although, when such persons come to confession, they are scrupulous about many sinless things, while they neglect or pay little attention to real sins.

What folly for a man who is sunk in vice to have a scruple about stepping on a cross of straw, or omitting his usual prayers or works of devotion, and so on! Scruples of that kind are like those of the high priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, who were afraid of defiling themselves by entering the judgment-hall of Pilate, or receiving back the thirty pieces of silver from Judas, while they had not the least hesitation about suborning false witnesses, and glutting their hatred by condemning the innocent Son of God to a disgraceful death. Nor do I reckon as scrupulous those who associate freely with persons of the opposite sex; who dance and amuse themselves, allowing full liberty to eyes, ears, hands, and all their senses, yet, when they come to confession, are scrupulous as to whether they have consented to impure thoughts or actions. Scruples of that kind are very well founded, indeed! They are like the scruple of the peasant who said to his confessor: "Father, there is something else that I have a scruple about." "And what is it?" "I have stolen a horse."

4. There are many who have lived in impurity for a long time and have committed many sins through that horrible vice. For these, the frequent repetition of such sins in a general confession would be not only useless and unnecessary, but even very dangerous. It would be like trying to extinguish a fire by throwing oil on it, or to drive away a hungry dog by giving him a piece of meat, which would only attract him all the more. It is like to stirring up a noisome sink, the only effect of which is to create a foul odor. In the same way, the only effect of recalling sins of impurity is to give occasion to other unchaste thoughts and desires. Therefore, once such sins have been got rid of by a good general confession, they must be forgotten completely, be buried in oblivion. Nor should they ever be mentioned in confession again, unless in a general way; for instance, I am sorry for all sins of my past life that I committed against holy purity; not a word more should be said about them. Other sins may be mentioned freely, if one wishes to do so, (although that is not nec-

essary, once a general confession of them has been made) ; especially when one has to go to another confessor, that the latter may know the state of his penitent's conscience.

I would advise you,who have not yet made a general confession, to make one at once,and keep up the practice of making one every year, of all the sins that you have committed since your last general confession. If you do that, you will be able to console yourselves at the end of your life with the assurance that you have squared all your accounts with God. But,some will say: "What is the use of going to so much trouble? I am not uneasy about my past confessions; I did what I could to make them well." So much the better for you that you have no apparent need of a general confession. Still, you will find it of the greatest advantage in cleansing your conscience more thoroughly and giving you more peace of mind. Was it necessary for the pious king Ezechias to examine, as he did, his whole life? No, he did it out of devotion,and for the sake of greater security, thereby giving us an example, which we would do well to imitate. "I will recount to thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul" (Isa. 36: 15), says Ezechias, after he had been restored to health and strength. He does not say merely that he will think of his sins, but that he will recount them; that is, he is not satisfied with bewailing them once; but in the bitterness of his soul he will deplore all his sins one by one. He will examine not merely the sins of one year, but those of his whole life: "I will recount to thee all my years." Why did St. Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, publish his sins in the Epistle he wrote to his disciple Timothy: "Who before was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and contumelious" (1Tim.1:13)? Was it necessary for him to make such a public confession? or did he still stand in need of pardon? But all his sins were forgiven in Baptism, as he acknowledges in the same verse of the same Epistle:"But I obtained the mercy of God"(Ibid.). The reason of his doing so was that he knew well the advantage to be derived from the sorrowful recollection and repeated confession of his sins. If St. Paul, who had the assurance of being forgiven, acted in that way, what should not the ordinary Chris-

tian do, who has not such an assurance? Ask St. Augustine why he published the confession of his sins, so that every one might read it. Was he obliged to do it? No, he says himself. "It is solely out of love for thee, O Lord, he exclaims, "that I publish the iniquities of my life."

There is no doubt that the crafty tempter will try to put all kinds of difficulties in our way, to hinder us from making a general confession. Long experience has taught him, that many souls are rescued from him by that means; but let us only bravely, and seriously undertake this work, so necessary for our souls, and we shall make the hour of our death one of consolation and joy. Amen.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE MANNER OF CONFESSION.

"*But he was silent.*" Matt. 22 : 12.

When we offend God by mortal sin, we lose the wedding-garment of sanctifying grace, and are doomed to eternal darkness; but we have an easy and advantageous means of regaining our lost cause, namely, the holy Sacrament of Penance. How comes it, then, that countless numbers of sinners still remain in their unhappy state? Alas! they act like the unhappy man in to-day's Gospel: "He was silent." They refuse to confess their sins, or they do not confess them in the proper manner. Learn then, my brethren, that one should make his confession,

I. Humbly; and

II. Candidly.

I. There is no virtue which so wins the favor of God, as humility. Humility is the measure by which he distributes his graces and favors; for, as St. Peter says: "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (Pet. 5 : 5). "He hath regarded the

humility of his handmaid," says the Queen of heaven in her Magnificat. Great as she was, without humility, even she would not have pleased God. If God then requires, even from his Mother and his dearest friends, that they should humble themselves, in order to retain his friendship and receive further graces from him, how much more will he insist on his enemies humbling themselves, if they wish to regain his grace and favor? Who are you, sinner, when you come to confession? You are a beggar about to implore the greatest of favors from an infinitely great and almighty Lord, who has not the least need of you, and who is at the same time exceedingly wroth with you. You are a traitor guilty of high-treason, and suing the divine Majesty for pardon. You are a debtor without a single farthing, imprisoned until now, and about to humbly beg the remission of your debt. You are a poor sinner convinced of your evil ways, and deserving condign punishment, who now appear before your angry Judge to implore his mercy, and the revocation of the terrible sentence pronounced against you. O, with what deep interior and exterior humility you should approach the sacred tribunal!

When you go to confession, do not imagine that you have to deal with the priest alone. There is another invisible confessor abiding in him, Jesus Christ, whom the eternal Father has made Judge of all creatures. He it is who hears your accusation in order to absolve you from your sins. He raises his hand with the priest, and utters by the lips of the priest the words of absolution. He shares with you the infinite merits of his precious Blood and of the death he suffered for you, to satisfy for and to blot out your sins; and he it is, who receives you again into his grace and friendship. Is it not right, then, that you should appear before such a Judge with the greatest modesty, humility, and lowliness? Although you may be a learned, rich, or great man in the eyes of the world, you are not deserving of any special consideration on that account in the confessional. You must, so to speak, strip yourself of your personality, and lay it aside, before entering that sacred tribunal, wherein lord and peasant, beggar and king, are

on the same footing, all appearing as poor sinners, doomed to eternal death, humbly approaching their Judge in order to beg for mercy.

How did the Ninivites do penance? "They put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least" (Jonas 3 : 5). There was no distinction then between the lady and her maid, the master and his servant, the king and the lowest of his scullions. All alike assumed the character of penitents, that is, of men who humbled themselves. "And God saw their works, that they were turned from their evil way; and God had mercy with regard to the evil which he had said that he would do them, and he did it not" (Ibid. 10). Thus also king Achab averted a threatened destruction. "He rent his garments, and put hair-cloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and slept in sack-cloth, and walked with his head cast down" (3 Kings 21 : 27). And God said of him: "Because he hath humbled himself for my sake, I will not bring the evil in his days" (Ibid. 29). The publican, crouching in shame and sorrow in an obscure corner of the temple, goes down to his house justified, while the proud Pharisee, flaunting his good works in the front, is rejected by the Most High. "A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 1: 19), says the penitent David.

When you appear in the confessional, you must be humble of heart, acknowledging yourself worthy of hell fire and undeserving of pardon; humble of speech, declaring your sins with a holy fear, and with modest and respectful words; and humble of manner, showing by downcast eyes, bended knees, and folded hands, that you are before the Judge of the living and the dead, awaiting your sentence.

But are they humble penitents who come to confession dressed in the height of the fashion, and in a vain, and sometimes, a scandalous style, actually giving occasion of sin to others, while they are accusing themselves of their own sins? If a stranger—a non-Catholic—(seeing them there), were to ask: "Who are those people and what are they doing?" could I reply: "They are poor sinners, humbly begging pardon of God whom they have offended"—?

"Sinners?"—"Beggars?"—he would have every reason to exclaim with a laugh: "Truly they look like it! are they not rather vain, frivolous creatures who come hither to be admired, and to attract the attention of others?"

And if he were to ask further: "Who are these that, while they wait their turn to enter the confessional, are looking around, laughing, and talking with each other?" "They too, I reply, are poor sinners waiting to appear before their Judge, in order to accuse themselves, and humbly ask for forgiveness." "Eh?" he would say, "but that is a strange way for them to act! They do not appear to care much for their angry Judge. It seems to matter little to them whether they are forgiven or not!" And he is right. None of these people manifest in their behavior the humility befitting a repentant sinner.

See that man coming along the street, with a heavy burden on his head; he is bowed down under his burden,—he sweats and groans under its weight. If he tripped gaily along, looking cheerfully from side to side, you would soon conclude: "This man does not carry a burden of lead or iron, he must be carrying feathers, or a bag inflated with air; or else is very strong, and does not feel the weight of his load!" Sinner, when you come to confession, having even one mortal sin on your soul, do you know what you bear? A burden of itself capable of dragging you down to the depths of hell; a burden under which David groaned and sighed: "My iniquities are gone over my head; and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me" (Ps. 37:5). A burden that the heavens could not tolerate in rebel angels, who had sinned against their Creator by a single thought. A burden that engulfed Pharao and his host in the Red Sea. A burden that has sunk thousands into hell. And you laugh and sing under the weight of it? You look about you, and show every sign of outward pride, when you come to lay it aside in confession? If you once realized what it is to have made God your enemy, what an endless good you have thereby lost, what a terrible punishment you have thereby incurred, you would almost die of grief and sorrow; you would approach the sacred tribunal like a

poor criminal, about to be led forth from court, after having had sentence of death passed upon him.

But what shall I say of those penitents who tell their manifold and grievous sins as coolly and indifferently as if they were telling the latest news; who dispute and argue with their confessor when he tries to persuade them of the malice of their sins, or of their bounden obligations; or who complain of the penance he imposes on them, and grumble against him for not having treated them with sufficient consideration. How then do you expect your confessor to treat you? As a great lord, or a noble lady? No, for you do not appear in that character in the confessional. There, you are simply a poor sinner deserving of hell, and coming before your Judge to implore his forgiveness. To obtain his grace and mercy, you must not only confess your sins with humility, but also

II. With candor.

The penitent sinner must acknowledge his faults in confession clearly and plainly, without trying to excuse, palliate, lessen, or conceal them. Numbers of people make every effort to throw the blame of their sins off their own shoulders. They put forth as an excuse the weakness of their nature, the sudden surprise of passion, the violence of temptation, which they were unable to overcome under the circumstances, the allurements of an occasion into which they came without intending it, the grievousness of the insult offered them, the high position of the person to please whom they did something unlawful. Thus, they strive to lessen the wickedness and shamefulness of their impurity, drunkenness, vindictiveness, injustice, or anger, so that the confessor may have pity on them, and let them off easy.

King Saul once made a confession of this kind, when he acknowledged his sins to Samuel: "I have sinned," said he: "because I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words;" but he immediately added the excuse, "Fearing the people and obeying their voice" (1Kings 15 : 24). In this way, he tried to

make himself appear more innocent than he really was, and therefore, his repentance and confession were rejected by the Lord. "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord," continued Samuel, "the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel" (Ibid. 26). How differently David acted! When he saw the angel destroying his people, he cried out: "It is I that have sinned; I have done wickedly!" (2Kings 24 : 17). So, every true penitent should say: "It is I who have sinned. The whole malice of the sin lies in my own will; 'through my fault, through my most grievous fault'."

Other cunning penitents tell part of their sins in a clear voice, while they mutter the rest between their teeth, so that the confessor cannot well understand what they are saying. Or else they purposely use equivocating expressions, that leave the priest unable to form a positive judgment of their case. For instance, a person says: "I have stolen." "What did you steal?" asks the priest. "I have stolen a purse." "And was it of much value?" "No, it was an old leathern purse, that was not worth anything." "Oh!" thinks the confessor: "then it was a small theft." And the penitent goes away. But wait a bit! "Was there anything in the purse?" "Yes," there were a hundred dollars in it." "What did you do with them?" "I took them, too!" Oh! that is another thing altogether. Mark the craftiness of this sinner, who instead of saying that he stole the money, says merely that he took the purse.

Many confess their sins in this way. A light and worldly woman, for example, accuses herself thus: "I have sometimes given way to vanity and curiosity?" What do you mean by that? Are you not trying to hide dangerous looks and wanton gestures under the name of vanity and curiosity? Those impure thoughts and desires which you occasion in yourself and others by your unwarranted freedom in company, are they merely sins of vanity? The jealousy and secret rage of your husband, who notices your conduct, is that, too, mere vanity? The profanation of the house of God, in which you appear dressed in a scandalous style, that might easily excite others to sin, is that only

vanity? The desire and secret longing for an unlawful affection on the part of those who see you thus tricked out, the reading of impure love-romances, the bad example you give your household, are these, and all the sins that follow from them, to be classed simply as mere curiosity and vanity? No; you are not candid in confession. "I have sought sensual pleasure," says another. What do you mean by sensual pleasure? Looking closely into it, the priest often finds it to have been some carnal and illicit pleasure, which should have been confessed by quite another and more shameful name. Make a clean breast of the whole matter or else your confession is of no value. "I have spoken ill of my neighbor," says another. Out with it at once! Did you not speak ill of your neighbor through hatred and vindictiveness? did you lessen his good name? was what you said true or false? did you speak in presence of one, or of several? Another confesses: "I was angry": but what did you do in your anger? "I was idle"—what was the consequence of your idleness? Did you neglect your household duties, or the care of your children? All these things have to be declared to the priest, if your confession is to be a good and valid one, in the sight of God.

Ah, with reason does David complain, that "iniquity hath lied to itself" (Ps. 26 : 12). Christians, what do you gain by those false confessions? Whom do you deceive? God? the priest? or yourselves? The priest, who cannot see your heart, may sometimes, indeed, be tricked into giving you absolution; but the almighty God, whom the priest represents, will call out to your conscience: "Why do you pretend to be what you are not? I know you thoroughly; and therefore, I now announce eternal death to you. Instead of saying, 'I absolve you,' I say 'I condemn you!'" Ah, unhappy sinner, if your God condemns you, who then can absolve you? Do you madly wish to transform the confessional, which our Lord Jesus Christ has made a throne of grace, into a stern judgment-seat, in which, by your hypocritical confession, you will provoke against yourself the sentence of eternal damnation?

Henceforth, make your confession as if (which is in reality the case), you were before God's very eyes. Confess your sins humbly and candidly, with all their circumstances, as far as you know you are guilty of them ; and then you can confidently expect one day, to find written in the great account-book the words which the priest in God's place here pronounces over you : "I absolve thee from thy sins ;" they are all blotted out. Enter into the joy of your Lord amongst the number of true penitents. Amen.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

GRATITUDE FOR THE BENEFIT OF PENANCE.

"*Thy son liveth ; and himself believed, and his whole house.*"
John 4 : 53.

This man only required to hear the words: "Thy son liveth," thy son, who was at the point of death, is now alive and well; and behold he himself believed, and his whole house with him. How comes it, that similar and even far greater benefits are daily conferred on us—for there are few among us who have not experienced like wonderful effects of the divine goodness—and yet we hardly think anything of them! Whenever one is absolved from mortal sin in sacramental confession, God says to him, "thy soul," that was dead, "liveth." That benefit (which is almost the greatest of all), is the one for which we return the least thanks to God. We do not value it as we ought. To-day, I shall try to show that awakening of the soul from the death of sin is one of God's greatest benefits to us:

I. In itself, and

II. In the manner in which God bestows it on us.

I. When a convalescent, who has been dangerously ill, compares

with his past grievous pains the agreeable change and the bodily comfort he now experiences, he is forced to cry out, in the joy of his heart, infinite thanks be to the good God! What a great benefit he has bestowed on me, in raising me up from my bed of suffering,and restoring me to health! In the same way, repentant sinners, when you remember the unhappy state of your souls while you were living in sin, and compare it with the wonderful and happy change wrought by the grace of sacramental absolution, you may reasonably conclude that the forgiveness of sin is an extraordinarily great benefit, for which one can never be grateful enough to God during his whole life.

Come with me in imagination to the court of Constantinople, and see what happened there in former times. Michael Balbus, an illustrious prince and minister of the emperor Leo, was accused, and found guilty of having conspired against the emperor. He was thrown into prison and was condemned to be burnt alive. It happened to be at Christmas time that he was led out to execution, and the empress Theodosia, seeing the miserable state of the unhappy prince,and influenced,too, by a feeling of reverence for the holy season, fell at the emperor's feet, and earnestly besought him not to sully the great festival by such a horrible tragedy. Leo was displeased at her request, but consented to put off the execution till after the festival. What happened? On the eve of the day appointed for the guilty man's execution, Leo died, and Michael Balbus was brought forth from prison and proclaimed emperor. As they could not find the keys to unlock the chains wherewith he was bound, they placed him on the throne fettered as he was, and on the following day he was solemnly crowned in the church of St. Sophia. What a wonderful change that was for him! From a prison to a throne, from fetters to a crown, from the fire, in which he was on the point of being burnt alive, to the highest glory of the empire. Who could describe the joy of that prince at such a sudden and miraculous change of fortune? Could he ever have been sufficiently grateful to her who was the cause of it? But, great as was his good fortune it is but a shadow compared to that

of the human soul, freed by grace from the state of sin and again received by God into favor.

By sanctifying grace received in Baptism, O sinner ! you were made a prince and an heir of the kingdom of heaven, an intimate friend of the sovereign God; but when you rebelled against God, by mortal sin, you became in an instant, a rebel guilty of high treason, and sentenced to everlasting damnation in the fire of hell. Who prevented the execution of that sentence ? Who but the Empress of heaven, most holy Mary, who persuaded her Divine Son to look on you with eyes of pity, and allow his enraged justice to give you a little more time. "Unless the Lord had been my helper," you may well say, with thankful heart, like the penitent David, "my soul had almost dwelt in hell" (Ps. 3:17). God forestalled you with his grace, touched and softened your heart, so that you repented of your sins, confessed them, and received absolution.

How great and marvelous was the change that then took place in you ! Delivered from the bonds of the foul fiend, generously clothed by God with the costly robe of sanctifying grace, adorned with his divine gifts and supernatural virtues, and reinstated in all your lost merits, you were placed, so to speak, on the divine throne, as a beloved child of God and a lawful heir of the kingdom of heaven, to whom the crown of honor and glory belongs as a right, that you may reign with God forever. Tell me, O sinner! what were your feelings when this wonderful change was wrought in you ? How were you able to contain yourself for sudden joy ? Could you ever forget such a great benefit ? Is it possible that you do not openly confess that you are eternally bound to your God,and that you owe him therefore a debt of the greatest gratitude?

Our creation is, as we must acknowledge, a great benefit on the part of God. In preference to countless creatures, which he left to their nothingness, he has drawn us forth from nothing and given us this temporal life. But what is the gift of creation compared to that divine goodness which has rescued our dead souls from the jaws of hell, and restored them to eternal life ? By the temporal life of the body God has opened to us the door to the

transitory goods of this earth, which are accompanied by many annoyances and contradictions; but with the spiritual life of the soul, he has reopened to us the door to eternal, heavenly goods, which had been closed against us by our sins.

Again, what do we not owe Jesus Christ, for the inestimable grace of redemption? For our salvation, the Son of God descended from the throne of his heavenly glory, became man like us, spent thirty-three years in poverty, and finally sacrificed himself for us completely, dying the bitter death of the cross. If we had a hundred thousand lives at our disposal, and gave them all up to our Lord Jesus Christ out of gratitude, we should still fail to make him an adequate return; and yet this redemption was but a means to the forgiveness of sin, without which the offended justice of God could not have been fully satisfied for even one mortal sin. The justification of the sinner was the chief end of that redemption, which cost the innocent Son of God so much that, in order to accomplish it according to the will of his heavenly Father, he had to suffer and die. "Who was delivered up for our sins," says St. Paul to the Romans, "and rose again for our justification" (Rom. 4 : 25).

In order to see the greatness of this benefit, read the Gospel, and there find that Jesus Christ makes more account of the conversion of a sinner, than of raising the dead. After raising Lazarus from the dead who had been four days in the grave, he allowed him at once to go away. When he raised the son of the widow of Naim, "He gave him to his mother" (Luke 7 : 15). We read in to-day's Gospel, that he raised the ruler's son without even deigning to go into his house, although he was implored to do so. "Go thy way," he said to the father, "thy son liveth" (John 4 : 46). On the other hand, when he cast an eye of mercy on the sinner Matthew, whose heart he had softened and converted to penance, he did not say: "Go thy way," but "Follow me." When he converted the public sinner Zachæus, he said: "Make haste and come down; for this day I must abide in thy house." "This day, is salvation come to this house. For the Son of man

is come to seek and to save that which was lost"(Luke 19: 5, 9, 10). These words he never addressed to those whom he had healed or raised from the dead.

Why this difference ? One might reasonably imagine that he would keep the latter constantly at his side, in proof of his Almighty power before the people, but he derives far more honor and glory from the soul that has risen from the grave of sin than from the body that was restored to temporal life. In the conversion of the sinner, God manifests not only his goodness and mercy, but also his omnipotence, and that, too, far more than in the raising of the dead. A dead body cannot resist his will, he can do with it what he pleases; but a sinner, whose soul is dead, has full liberty,either to obey divine grace or to resist it,and therefore often opposes his holy will. Hence God must, so to speak, use more power in order to win the sinner's heart; consequently, "The triumph of the Lord is the justification of a sinner." And how often, O man, has not that benefit been bestowed on you and me ? If we wish to see further what a debt of gratitude we owe therefore to God, let us consider

II. The manner in which he confers it on us.

Not every one has the power to do good to others ; but what better am I, if he who can help me, has not the will to do so ? In the Gospel, we have an instance of one doing good against his will, in the man who, conquered by the importunity of his neighbor, got out of his bed at night to give him the required loaves of bread. The best quality of a benefit is the willingness and readiness with which it is conferred. A service obtained only by dint of hard begging is not valued much by the world, and still less by God. Hence, the Apostle St. Paul warns us, that "God loveth a cheerful giver"(2 Cor. 9 : 7).

It is this which renders still more excellent the great and wonderful benefit of the forgiveness of sin. God bestows it with the greatest willingness and readiness. It is a source of joy to him if the sinner is only willing to accept it ; and, in fact, he rejoices more therein, than in giving graces to his beloved children, to in-

nocent and pious souls, as we learn from the testimony of Christ himself. After having described the joy of the shepherd who has found the lost sheep, he adds: "I say to you that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance" (Luke 15 : 7).

God confers this benefit on every sinner who earnestly desires it, no matter how many or grievous his sins are. No one who implores that grace is rejected by God, as long as life lasts. Never does the sinner come too late to receive forgiveness. According to St. Augustine, Jesus Christ was pleased to leave us a loving proof of this when he hung dead upon the cross. "One of the soldiers with a spear opened his side" (John 19 : 34). Why was his side opened? Did the soldiers wish to assure themselves of his death? No, for they knew already that he was dead: "But after they were come to Jesus, when they saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs" (Ibid. 33); "but one of the soldiers with a spear opened his side." What, then, is the meaning of the mystery? There is a great difference between a wound inflicted on a living body, and a wound inflicted on a corpse. In the living body, the wound closes again in time; but no medicine or care can close the wound of a dead body. Now, the wound in the Heart of Jesus is an ever-open door, always ready to admit penitent sinners. Therefore, Christ wished to receive it, not while in life, but after death, so that it could never be healed, and that all sinners might, at all times, find the door of mercy and forgiveness open to them.

Lastly, God bestows this great benefit before the sinner asks for it, nay, before he even thinks of it. For the sinner must always be prevented by the divine inspirations, in order to desire and ask for the grace of repentance and forgiveness. We have a beautiful example of this in the Acts of the Apostles. As St. Peter and St. John went to the Temple, one day, they saw sitting before the gate, a man who had been a cripple from his birth. "He, when he had seen Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked to receive an alms" (Acts 3 : 3). He knew well, that

they were disciples of Christ, and he believed that they had the power of working miracles. But he did not ask them to heal him; such a thought never entered his head. He was suffering a two-fold trial, poverty and lameness; and, no doubt, the latter was worse than the former; for it is better to be poor than to be a cripple. Why, then, did he not beg to be freed from the greater evil, from his lameness? Yet he got what he did not ask for, for Peter said to him: "Silver and gold I have none, but what I have I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk; and he, leaping up, stood and walked" (Ibid. 6). What a sudden joy filled his heart at the great and unexpected benefit he received, instead of the trifling alms he had asked for. "He went with them into the temple, walking and leaping, and praising God" (Ibid. 8). Sinner, look back on the past; did not the same thing happen to you, as to this cripple? When you were still in the state of sin, what was the end of your desires and wishes? Ah, you were begging for a worthless alms from some creature, for a miserable and momentary carnal pleasure, for the vain esteem and good opinion of men, or for some wretched gain, or satisfaction. Your most important business was to see that it was restored to health, freed from its miseries, saved from hell, and placed on the right road to heaven. But you never even thought of that; your vicious habits had made you insensible to such things. Many and many a time you went into the church without feeling the least desire for the grace of repentance and conversion. God thought of your salvation, and had in readiness for you the wonderful benefit of forgiveness. And what did God ask from us in return? A penitent sigh, "I have sinned; I am sorry for what I have done." The candid, contrite confession of our misdeeds to a man like ourselves in the confessional was enough to induce him to remit the guilt of our sins and the eternal punishment due them.

And now we can rejoice and say, with David: "Our soul hath been delivered as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and we are delivered" (Ps. 123: 7). What shall I

render to the Lord?" (Ps. 115: 12). What return shall we make our benefactor? Tell me, O sinner. I ask myself and you, too, if the just God had taken us out of the world immediately after we had committed our last mortal sin, where would our poor soul be this moment? In hell, without any hope of release. Now let us suppose an impossible case: If God should recall a lost soul to life, deliver it from eternal torments, and promise it a happy eternity, what return would it make him? What gratitude would it not show him? Now, is not this precisely the same benefit which he bestows on us, when he forgives our sins? Nay, the latter is even a greater benefit, for he does not condemn us to hell, as we have deserved, but forgives us without sending us there.

What do we not owe God? What return can we make him? That of never offending him again? No, that is too small a return for us to make! What, then, shall we do? Love him with all our heart? Yes, that is all we can do for him; and that we should be determined to do, as long as he permits us to live. "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever" (Ps. 88 : 2). Amen.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE WICKEDNESS OF THOSE WHO SIN IN THE HOPE OF BEING FORGIVEN IN CONFESSION.

And his Lord being angry delivered him to the torturers. Matt. 18:34.

This parable represents in a striking manner what has often taken place, and what still takes place between God and the sinner. In it you have a symbol, first, of the infinite goodness of God towards the repenting sinner, and second, of the inconceivable ingratitude of many sinners, who abuse and outrage the goodness and mercy of God, and who continually alternate between confession

and sin, sin and confession, profaning the holy Sacrament of Penance by their wicked lives. Against those sinners, I direct my words to-day; and I tell them beforehand that they are in the greatest and most evident danger of eternal damnation,

I. Because they will never be really converted to God; and

II. Because God will hardly ever give them the grace of true repentance.

I. He who does not understand his business will not perform it rightly. So, also, he who does not understand what is necessary for true repentance, will never be really converted to God, nor obtain forgiveness of his sins. Presumptuous man, who fall into grievous sin without scruple or shame, flattering yourself that it does not make much matter, so that you confess it afterwards, learn that the declaration of one's sins to the priest in confession is the least of the things required for true repentance. That which is most necessary for the true conversion of a sinner is contrition for his sins; that sorrow must be (1) sincere and interior, (2) supernatural, (3) universal, and (4) sovereign. It must include, also, a firm purpose of the will rather to die than to offend God again by one mortal sin. Do you understand this?

1. In the first place, do you believe that such a sorrow is required for the validity of your confession? If so, you act against all the laws of common sense, and are utterly incapable of true contrition when you say to yourself, I will commit this sin, or I will continue committing it, because I can confess and repent of it afterwards. Who ever heard a man say: "I will throw myself down from the top of this wall and break my arms and legs; but afterwards I will be sorry for my folly, and will condemn it with bitter tears, and will send for an experienced doctor to heal my wounds?" Or: "I will set fire to my house, but will regret afterwards that I have done so, and, with great expense, will build a new one." Or, again: "I will marry that notoriously wicked woman, and afterwards, will wish sincerely that I had never seen

her!" Would not such a man be regarded as a fool or a madman? But such and even greater is the folly you are guilty of, when you commit mortal sin, because you think that you will afterwards be able to repent of and confess it.

2. Further, considering your mode of action, are you able to awaken the true sorrow and repentance required by God, or will you be able to awaken it later on? What will be your motives? What have they been hitherto? It is well known that contrition for sin is twofold, namely, perfect and imperfect. Perfect contrition comes from a perfect love of God, arising from the knowledge given us by faith that God is of, and in, himself, the infinite and supreme Good, and of himself, is worthy of infinite love and esteem. Therefore, it grieves us above all things that we have offended such a God who is worthy of all love. Imperfect sorrow arises either from the fear of God's justice and the dread of hell-fire; from the recollection of God's many benefits, and the consideration of the loss of heaven; or else it arises from a reflection on the deformity of sin. None of these motives is capable of exciting you to a true sorrow for and detestation of your sins. You neither love nor fear God sincerely; nor do you acknowledge the benefits you have received from him. You do not value the joys of heaven, nor entertain a real horror of sin. So that there is no motive capable of arousing in you a true sorrow, and since you go on from one confession to another, saying, I will commit this sin, and confess it afterwards, you are hardly ever capable of having a real sorrow and of being truly converted to God. But suppose your presumptuous hope is realized (for the human will may change at any moment); suppose that, moved by some special light to a real love or fear of God, you repent of your sins, and make a good confession, how long will your conversion last?

Rash man, who have continued heaping sin on sin, depending on the chance of making a good confession, how will you be able to resist to the end the effects of inveterate habit, and those inclinations which, being already implanted in your nature, have acquired additional

violence by long indulgence; how will you be able to resist them, even supposing that you are truly converted and make a good confession? How can you promise yourself a victory over them, after having made a second nature out of your evil habits? How will you be able to vanquish them, when the devil comes with his suggestions and temptations, strengthening your natural inclinations to sin? The oftener you have allowed yourself to be overcome by the devil, the more are you enslaved by him, the stronger the dominion he has over you and your evil desires; and what will be the terrible consequences? I will commit sin, you say to yourself, and afterwards I will repent of and confess it; or, I will gratify my passions this once, and then one confession will make it all right. Ah! all that is nothing but a deceit of the devil! Do not trust him! The crafty tempter acts like a general who, having obtained permission to pass through the enemy's country with one or two companies of soldiers, promising to remain but a day or two, as soon as he has effected an entry, fortifies himself and is not easily dislodged. So the devil, our sworn enemy, seems to be satisfied, in the beginning, if we grant him simply a right of way. He suggests to a man that he ought to try this pleasure; he can repent of it afterwards; and if the suggestion is acted on, he persuades his victim to try the same pleasure once more, trusting again in a future confession. But you must be on your guard, or else he will bring matters so far with his suggestions that, keeping fast hold of you as his bond-slave, he will at last cause you to die impenitent, so that all the confessions you have made, and all the penance you intended doing, will be of no avail to you.

II. God does not give the grace of true repentance to the presumptuous sinner.

Man, by his own unassisted strength, can do no supernaturally good work. Much less can he free himself from the state of sin, repent of his evil deeds, and do penance as he ought, unless God helps him by his preventing and co-operating grace. This extraordinary grace God is not bound to give to any wilfully grievous sin-

ner. Furthermore, he can withdraw all other graces and helps as he pleases, so that the sinner, according to his deserts, must necessarily be lost forever. Moreover, the greater the malice and number of sins that one has committed, and the more inveterate his habits of sinning, so also the greater, more powerful, and extraordinary must be the helps and graces he receives from God in order to be converted. Consequently the less, too, is God obliged to help him in such a special manner. Do you understand this clearly, presumptuous man, when you sin without scruple, and heap sin on sin, trusting to a future confession? How can you reasonably hope that God will give you such a special grace of repentance, I do not say every time you go to confession but at any time at all? No, that is not likely; for, you neither deserve that grace, nor is it becoming for God to give it you.

1. You do not deserve that grace. It is generally acknowledged amongst men of the world that he who is ungrateful to his benefactor deserves to be deprived of the benefits he has received; and much more so, if he has misused those benefits to insult and injure his benefactor. The Sacrament of Penance is founded on the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is instituted as a special benefit and a necessary help for us poor, frail mortals, since by its means, if we commit a mortal sin, we can free ourselves from it, and more easily avoid a relapse. But you, O sinner! abuse this very benefit as a reason and a means of sinning all the more shamelessly against God. For, if there was no confession, if you knew for certain that, should you commit a grievous sin, there is no means of freeing your conscience from it, you would surely be more on your guard against mortal sin, and would not allow yourself to be so easily overcome by temptation. Since, however, the good and merciful God has appointed this easy means of procuring pardon, you contemn him without scruple, and add sin to sin. "I will commit sin," you think, "because I can tell it in confession afterwards." That is to say: "I will offend my God, because he has given me a means of free-

ing myself from the state of sin! I will offend my God, because he will forgive me afterwards." In a word, your meaning is: I will despise my God, and defy him, because being so good and merciful, he will afterwards receive me into his grace and friendship. Is not that abusing a benefit to insult the Benefactor?

2. But you expect an extraordinary grace from your outraged God: On what do you ground your presumptuous hope? The holiest Saints were often obliged to beg for years and years before obtaining certain favors from him. St. Paul, a chosen vessel of election, prayed, while constantly chastising and mortifying his body, for the grace to be freed from the assaults of the flesh; and yet, as he himself acknowledges, he did not receive it. Pious souls, who seek for nothing in the world but to please God more and more, and to fulfil his holy will in all things, how long have they not to pray, sometimes for a certain virtue, such as angelic purity, patience under adversity, love of crosses and humiliations, before they obtain from God the favor they long for so earnestly? And you, after having so long abused the benefits of God, and profaned the holy Sacrament of Penance, you are not afraid to promise yourself that you will obtain a far greater favor, namely, the grace of true repentance, whenever you may be pleased to accept it! God must be ready at your nod and beck, to prepare for you a grace that he is bound to give to no man who has sinned mortally even once, and through frailty! No! no! pearls are not to be cast before swine in that way! True, the mercy of God in receiving sinners is exceedingly great; but he has not entrusted it to any one to do with it what he likes, as you seem to be presumptuous enough to imagine. You act as if you had a document in your possession assuring you of the grace of conversion whenever you are willing to claim it. But that is not the case: "I will have mercy on whom I will," said God to Moses, "and I will be merciful to whom it shall please me" (Exod. 33 : 19). To you, I say, he will not at all times give the grace of true repentance, since you make a bad use of it to commit sin; nay, he cannot, so to speak, give it to you, as a general rule, for that would not be becoming him.

It is a consoling truth, that his goodness and mercy are limitless and endless, that the treasures of his grace are inexhaustible; but it is also infallibly certain, that he dispenses his favors with the greatest judgment, as becomes such a just and wise Lord; and that he always acts with a view to his own honor and glory, that men may praise and magnify him all the more. He justly desires that his benefits should be recognized and prized. For this reason, he often refuses for a long time to grant the favor asked of him by his holiest servants, in order that, when received at last, they may value them the more; for what is easily gotten, generally speaking, is little valued. He has decreed an eternal punishment for every mortal sin, so that the fear of hell may act as a check on men, to keep them from offending him, and to make them faithful in his service. Now, all this would go for nothing, if God, as a general rule, were to give the grace of true repentance to those who go on sinning in the hope of confessing their sins afterwards. Would he not seem to expose himself and his honor to mockery and contempt in his own world? Who would value the grace of repentance, if it were to be had whenever one wishes it, even after it had been shamefully abused! Who would fear the fire of hell, if every sinner were free to say: "Hell is not for me. I can sin as much as I please, and to-morrow, or the next day, I shall confess my sins, and all will be well with me!"

Such a state of things would confirm the impious in their wicked lives, and would lead infidels to mock and despise God! What scandal would be given the innocent! What cause for murmurs and complaints to the good and righteous, seeing that the pearl of God's kingdom is cast before swine,that is, offered at a cheap price to reckless and presumptuous sinners, while they themselves have to work out their salvation in fear and trembling, and amid continual labors and trials! "Be not deceived," is the warning given by St. Paul, "God it not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap" (Gal. 6 : 7, 8). If you sinned long and grievously against the divine commands, there is still hope for you ; only return with confidence ; repent

sincerely and confess your sins. Our merciful God does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live. But to rely on this confession, on this long-suffering mercy of God, in order to sin all the more boldly, because there is such an easy means at hand as the Sacrament of Penance, and God is always ready to forgive the sinner, that, I say, is a presumption abominable in the sight of the God of justice and all holiness.

Dogs, when they find the door open in the morning, run out at once ; they play, and jump about, and fight with each other, and carry on their games all over the town, till evening. Sometimes, indeed, they come home, when they find the door open and see the table laid ; but, as soon as they have swallowed a mouthful, they are away again, until nightfall, when they return; and if they happen to find the door closed, they bark and howl their loudest in order to get admittance. But their master is too sensible to pay any attention to the noise they make. He lets them howl away until they are tired, so that they have to suffer the pangs of hunger all night on the doorstep. "They shall suffer hunger like dogs." There you have a picture of the unhappy state of those sinners of whom I am speaking. They see the door of God's mercy open for them in the holy Sacrament of Penance ; but what do they do? They run about wildly all the days of their lives, falling from one sin into another. Sometimes, it is true, they come back and confess their sins, but after confession, they continue their wicked lives as before. "They shall return at evening ;" when the day is past, and the night of death is drawing nigh; but then, "they shall suffer hunger like dogs." They shall fare like the foolish virgins, who wished to return to the marriage feast after having purchased oil for their lamps. The door of grace is closed against them. "Lord, Lord, open to us" (Matt. 25 : 11), they exclaimed; but the only answer they got was, "I know you not."

"Be not deceived : God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also, shall reap corruption ; but he that soweth in the Spirit, of the Spirit shall reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6 : 7 : 8).

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

GOD'S GOODNESS TOWARDS THE PENITENT SINNER.

"*Render therefore to God the things that are God's.*" Matt. 22: 21.

Body and soul and all that we have are the things that are God's. We are literally composed of benefits, which we receive from his liberality every moment of our lives. He has created us out of nothing and kept us in life by his almighty power. He has cleansed us in Baptism from the sin in which we were born, and has adopted us as his children. And when we, by the sins we committed, treated God most contumeliously, and rejected that first grace, his mercy has again received us in the Sacrament of Penance to his favor and friendship. But what is most wonderful of all, he still continues to enrich us with countless benefits, as if we had never done the least thing to displease him. Body and soul, all we have are God's, everything we have is a benefit we receive from God. Countless are the benefits that God has bestowed upon us, especially that he has pardoned us our sins so often in the Sacrament of Penance and re-admitted us to his grace. Now I shall call your attention to the still more wonderful goodness that God shows after we have done penance and have been converted to him.

When sinners are converted,

I. The past is forgotten; and

II. Future rewards are promised to the penitent by God.

I. Rare and difficult it is for us to completely forget and pardon a grievous injury. Only too true are the words of St. Augustine: "Men never pardon fully,"—although they are offended by one like themselves.—Far more gracious and good is God to us. He is much more ready to forgive, and much more complete is his forgiveness! We poor worms of the earth, may have dared to

rebel against God ; we may have despised him to his very face, trampled his law under foot, and said to him, "I will not serve !" We will not do what he has commanded ! We may have done this ten, twenty, a hundred, a thousand times, until our sins have surpassed in number the hairs of our heads ; although he has never given us the least cause to offend him; although every moment of our lives we have enjoyed his benefits, and have had cause to love him above all things with our whole heart. After having treated him so unbecomingly, had he not just reason to cast us away from his sight forever, and to hate us as his irreconcilable enemy ? Certainly. Yet God, who in his infinite wisdom and omniscience, knows and sees all things, has at our first genuine act of contrition, received us again as fully into his friendship and love as if we had never offended him by our multiplied sins ; we again become his dear children, as we were when we were still innocent ; nor have we any reason to fear that he will remember our presumption, nor reproach us with our ingratitude, nor withdraw his favor from us on its account. Nay, we need not fear that he will even remember our sins for all eternity. Everything is as completely forgotten and buried as if it had never existed. "He will have mercy on us, he will put away our iniquities, and he will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea" (Mich. 17 : 19). "If the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed, I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done" (Ezech. 18: 21, 22).

If you read the Holy Scripture, you will find countless examples of sinners whom the Almighty has forgiven the most grievous sins, on their doing penance. In some cases you will see, that, after having forgiven the guilt of sin, the Lord has sent temporal calamities and afflictions, in order to help the sinner to satisfy in this life for what he owed the divine justice ; but you will not be able to point out a single instance in which the good God ever reproached a sinner with the sins he had forgiven. Magdalene was a public sinner ; Matthew was a usurer ; Peter denied his Master ; Thomas was an obstinate unbeliever. But did Christ, after having forgiven them, ever utter the least reproach on ac-

count of their former transgressions? No; not the slightest sign of displeasure ever escaped his lips on that account. And when our meek Lord wished to reprove the city of Jerusalem, what words did he use? "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets,and stonest them that are sent unto thee" (Matt. 23: 37). Had not many Prophets been slain in Jerusalem, before our Lord's time? Certainly. Why, then, did he not say: Thou who hast killed the Prophets, and still continuest to kill them? No, our Lord did not wish to say anything of past misdeeds, in order to show that which he has once forgiven is forgiven forever and forgotten. Therefore, if a man falls into sin, after doing penance, and is lost forever, the sins of which he repented will not be reckoned against him. "I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done."

Instead of secret spite and displeasure because of our past sins, there arises in the divine Heart a joy and satisfaction on our account, all the greater in proportion to the number and malice of our sins. How the shepherd rejoiced when he found the lost sheep and brought it home on his shoulders! How the woman exulted after having found the groat she had lost! In order to show their joy, they both called in their neighbors, and said to them: "Rejoice with me,because I have found my sheep,that was lost, . .because I have found the groat which I had lost." "And I say to you," adds our Lord, "that even so, there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance." We can easily understand the reason of this, if we do not look at the matter according to the usual way of the world; for the world judges far differently of such things; the more grievous the offence, the more bitter and inveterate the hatred it entails. But when we consider the examples of the Saints we can understand to a certain extent how God rejoices at the conversion of the sinner.

II. He promises future rewards to the true penitent.

What was the sinner before he did penance? A sick man, nay,

as far as his soul was concerned, a dead man, who was on the very brink of hell; he was an unfruitful, withered, worthless tree, that could only bring forth bad and corrupt fruit. He was one of those, of whom St. John the Baptist said to the Pharisees: "For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that doth not yield good fruit, shall be cut down and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3: 10). Now, the sick man is restored to health; the tree is in full blossom. But what labor and skill God had to employ before he brought matters to such a pitch! How many inspirations it took; how many exhortations, and interior warnings! How the Lord was forced to arouse the sinner's conscience either by his inspirations, or by his Angels, or by his preachers and confessors, to a sense of his unhappy state! Can we imagine that God is satisfied to expend in vain such an amount of trouble and labor? That the result is a matter of indifference to him? I rather think that he will value more highly him whom he has won with great trouble. He will help him by more copious graces, and strengthen and protect him in temptations, that he may not fall so easily into sin. He will make him more careful and humble by the knowledge of his weakness, and will urge him to greater zeal by the recollection of his past sins. It frequently happens, that they who were formerly great sinners, when they become converted to God by sincere repentance, are much more zealous in the divine service, and become holier than many others who never lost their innocence.

This special favor and love of God for penitent sinners, is unlike anything we find amongst men. A father is always more affectionate to an obedient and dutiful child than to a wilful and rebellious one. A sovereign shows more favor to his loyal subjects than to the insubordinate; the latter he keeps constantly in subjection. But it is not so with our Lord and God. He receives penitents as he does the just; and he gives his gifts and graces to the one as to the other.

If you compare those Saints who were always innocent with those

who were formerly sinners you shall see at once that such is the case. The innocent and holy Elias had the rain, as it were, at his command; the elements were bound to obey him; but not less was the power of the repentant James the Hermit, who had once committed a horrible sin in the desert, and then killed his accomplice. How often did not Mary of Egypt, that notorious and public sinner, walk on the water after her conversion, like the innocent St. Raymond? She also lived for many years without taking any nourishment, like the innocent Catharine of Siena. Thus, God receives penitent sinners as he does the just, and fulfils the promise he made: "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness" (Ezech. 33: 12). What a consolation for you and me, provided only we have the good will to be true to such a good God! Am I placing innocent and penitent Saints on the same level? Yes, for I find, that there are not a few penitent sinners who have enjoyed the favor and grace of God in a far higher degree than the former. Who was appointed by Jesus Christ as the chief of his Apostles and his Vicar on earth? Was it the innocent James or John? By no means. He who was appointed to that office was one who had thrice denied his Lord. Was not Paul, once an enemy and persecutor of Jesus Christ, that chosen vessel of election who did more than any one else to convert souls and spread God's honor and glory among the Gentiles? In the same way, it was not John, who had stood faithfully at the foot of the cross until our Lord's death, who was first granted the happiness and consolation of seeing the Risen Christ, but Peter, who had reason to weep so bitterly for his sins of denial, perjury and blasphemy. Not Martha, but the penitent Mary Magdalene sat at the feet of Christ, and heard his salutary doctrine,—Magdalene, the only woman mentioned in holy Scripture to whom he appeared after his Resurrection. And what wonderful graces God bestowed on St. Augustine, who had before been such a great sinner!

And you, O sinners, who have perhaps been frightened from doing penance by the number and greatness of your sins, what

are your thoughts when you consider this mercy of God? "Think of the Lord in goodness, and seek him in simplicity of heart" (Wisd. 1: 1). Even if you had all the sins of the world on your conscience, approach with confidence, do not let fear or shame keep you back. His arms are always outstretched to receive you as his dear children, and to treat you with all the more love and goodness, as you were more ungrateful and wicked towards him in the past. "To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps. 94: 8). Amen.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE CONCEALMENT OF SINS IN CONFESSION THROUGH SHAME.

"*He took her by the hand, and the maid arose.*" Matt. 9: 25.

Our Lord only touched the hand of the dead girl, and immediately her life returned. It is just as easy for him to restore life to the soul that is dead in sin. Let the priest, in the place of God raise his hand and pronounce the words of absolution, and at once, provided the penitent puts no obstacle in the way, the dead soul of the sinner lives in the Lord. Yet, how often alas! does the priest raise his hand and give absolution, while the sinner remains as he was, spiritually dead, because he is wanting in due examination of conscience, or in true contrition, or in a firm purpose of amendment, or in the candid confession of all his sins. To-day I will speak especially on this latter class of penitents, of those who deliberately conceal a grievous sin, or do not confess it fully through fear or shame. Deplorable, indeed, is the blindness of such souls; for thereby, they make themselves

I. Still more ashamed in this life; and

II. Still more ashamed in the life to come.

I. Why are you ashamed to confess your sins candidly? One ought to be ashamed, not of an honorable, but of a disgraceful act. That, you say, is just where the difficulty lies. It is certainly a disgraceful thing that makes a man blush and tremble with anguish. In what does this shame consist? In confessing your sins? Then it is a shame to tell the truth when one is obliged to tell it; and God has commanded you, under pain of eternal damnation, to do a disgraceful thing, for it is he who obliges you to declare all your mortal sins in confession. Can one receive supernatural grace, increase his merit, and gain heaven, by doing a disgraceful and, consequently, an unworthy thing? Is it disgraceful to seek a remedy in the precious Blood of Jesus to heal the mortal wounds of your soul? Disgraceful, to cover and take away your own deformity and misery? Disgraceful, to free yourself from the slavery of the devil, and become a friend of God; to give joy to the Angels in heaven, and honor and glory to the Most High? Did David, and Magdalene, Paul and Augustine, disgrace themselves by confessing their sins? Are they not honored by every one, precisely on account of that confession, which some of them actually wrote and published to the world? O! no, it is not disgraceful, but honorable, to confess one's sins. It is an act of justice by which you restore to God and your soul what you have stolen from them; an act of virtue, because it implies humility and the overcoming of yourself. If it be a shame, it is a shame that bringeth glory and grace (Ecclus. 4 : 25).

Sin is the only thing that has nothing honorable about it. It alone has brought the greatest disgrace on the soul, and has made it like the hideous demons, hateful to God, an abomination to Angels and men. You are ashamed to confess that grievous sin? But, when you made up your mind to commit it, where then was your fear, where your shame? You did not hesitate to defile your soul, even in the presence of others. Perhaps, you even boasted of your crime, and showed complacency at it; and now you are ashamed to free yourself from it? It is a trick of the devil to deprive of shame him who is about to commit sin, and to

give it back to him when he is about to confess it and to do penance for it. And the restitution is more cruel than the theft.

O sinner, when you conceal your guilt in confession, you prefer to be disgraced before God and your own conscience, rather than to face an imaginary shame, which is in reality honorable, just, and praiseworthy, and which will restore you your honor in the sight of God. You profane the Sacrament of Penance and receive an invalid absolution. Through fear of an imaginary evil, you rush headlong into a real misfortune. Nor is that all. You are bringing greater shame on yourself in the future. Tell me, what do you fear in confession? What is the great difficulty that unnerves you? Is it not the obligation of confessing your shameful sin? If you could, you would conceal it even from your own conscience. Answer me: are you determined never to confess it? If so, then woe to you, unhappy man, for you are lost forever! You will be dammed on account of your silence, when you might have been saved by confessing your sin. The sin you conceal cannot be taken away by an invalid absolution. Neither that nor any other one is forgiven (since one mortal sin cannot be forgiven without the other), unless it is candidly declared in confession. You may lead a most holy life in other respects, but if you keep that one sin locked up in your conscience, and are determined never to confess it candidly, you will be lost forever.

This truth is foreshadowed in the holy Scripture, especially in two men, one of whom was raised from death to life, while the other was condemned to death. The first is Lazarus; the second, that unhappy guest who appeared without a wedding-garment. The former was already mouldering away in his grave, yet Christ called to him: "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11: 43); the latter was seated at the festive board, enjoying himself: yet the king commanded him to be thrust into exterior darkness. The former was bound, and Christ ordered him to be loosed; the latter was at liberty, and the king commanded him to be bound hand and foot. Behold in Lazarus, the figure of the true penitent, who is raised by Jesus Christ from spiritual death to life; in the wedding-guest,

the figure of the impenitent sinner, who dies while in the state of sin.

This also accounts for the King's seemingly harsh treatment of the wedding-guest. When he was asked: "How camest thou in hither,not having on a wedding-garment?" (Matt. 22: 12), "He was silent" (Ibid.). He might have replied, that he had not money wherewith to buy costly clothing; but he was ashamed and did not like to make known his poverty. He could have said that he was not aware of the imposing character of the banquet, or, else, that he had not time to have proper clothing made; "but he was silent." He was ashamed to make known his ignorance and carelessness. At the very feast, he might have acknowledged his fault and have implored the king's pardon; but no, "he was silent." Hence, as he refused to confess, he was condemned: "Then the king said to the waiters: bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness"(Matt. 22: 13). The king ordered him to be bound, not when he entered the banquet-hall, nor when he appeared before the guests unsuitably clad,but when he was addressed by the king; namely,when he kept silent after having been admonished, and when, having been asked, he refused to answer. The king represents Jesus Christ, the same merciful Saviour who opens heaven to robbers and murderers, to the unchaste and adulterers, to thieves and drunkards, to blasphemers and the sacrilegious, when they repent; but who refuses to pardon those sinners who conceal, or do not properly declare their sins in confession.

Unhappy souls, are you then determined never to confess that sin? Alas, if so, then you have nothing to expect but eternal damnation. "Some time or other," I hear you say, "I will tell that sin properly in confession." But will you then feel less ashamed than now? Will that sin appear less horrible to your confessor, than it would now? Alas! you will have far more reason to be ashamed of it in the future, than you have now; for, in addition to confessing your long-concealed sin, you must also tell every one of the grievous sins you committed on account of it. One in the state of sin, cannot long refrain from other sins,

on account of the loss of God's special graces, and the darkness of his understanding. Apart from that, you have, at all events, committed another mortal sin, by making a bad confession. You have gone to holy Communion afterwards, and thus you have again increased your guilt. Next month, you go to confession and holy Communion again, but say nothing of the sin you have concealed, and, of course, you only add to your sins. Now, when that has been going on for the third, fourth, tenth, twentieth time; and for, perhaps, two,three, or ten years, what a fearful harvest of sin you thus reap! And if at last, you make up your mind to unbosom yourself, to overcome your shame, and to confess the sin you have so long kept to yourself,—it will not be enough to say: "So and so many years ago,I concealed that sin in confession, or I did not confess it properly,"—you must say also how often during that time you went to confession and received holy Communion or any other Sacrament; and, moreover, you must repeat, with their number and necessary circumstances, all the sins you committed and confessed during that time. Why so? you ask; have I not confessed them already? No matter; they must all be again declared, because not one of them has been forgiven; nay, it would have been better for you not to have gone to confession at all.

Try to take a reasonable view of the matter. If you are ashamed to tell one sin now, how great will not your shame be when you have thus a long and terrible catalogue of sins to reveal? Now you can tell the sin in less time than it takes to say the "Our Father"; afterwards, it will take you an hour or more to make your confession; and you will have to suffer more shame, to suffer it longer, and to suffer it more frequently. Is it not folly to choose a long and painful illness instead of a passing indisposition? I will say nothing of the gnawing of conscience, which torments such a sinner day and night, and continually reproaches him with his secret guilt; nothing of the exceeding great injury done his soul,for,during the whole time he is in the state of sin, none of his good works are meritorious of heaven; nor of the

terrible risk he runs of dying at any moment, and being hurled into hell.

If a thorn gets into your foot, do you not pull it out at once, although you hurt yourself in doing so? How long then will you keep that thorn, that concealed sin, in your conscience? Is it not better for you to take it out at once by a good confession, and at the cost of a little imaginary shame, than to allow it to rankle here for a long time, and to cover you with eternal shame?

II. In the life to come?

If you do not conquer this imaginary shame, what confusion you will bring upon yourself hereafter by concealing your sins! For you will certainly be put to infinite shame before all men, at the last Judgment. You will be exposed, not merely before one sinful mortal, but in presence of all the demons and reprobate of hell; not before one just man, but in presence of all the Angels and Saints of heaven; not before one compassionate man, but before all creatures, who shall be embittered against you and seek for vengeance on you; not to be justified and absolved, but to be condemned. Under all these terrible circumstances, you will have to declare openly the sin you now conceal. And the confusion that will then overwhelm you will be eternal, for it will never fade from the memory of the just, or of the wicked, nor will it ever cease to torment your own conscience. "Behold," threatens the Lord by the prophet Nahum, "I come against thee, saith the Lord of hosts . . . and I will show thy nakedness to the nations, and thy shame to kingdoms . . . and will disgrace thee and will make an example of thee" (Nahum 3: 5, 6). Ah, think what a terrible disgrace that will be! You now enter the confessional, in which one man is sitting with the intention of helping you, as if you were going into a torture-chamber; what will you not suffer if you have to disclose all your crimes before the same confessor from whom you wish to conceal them now, and before heaven and earth as well? Our very sins have voices, and at the last day they will cry out against you: Father, mother, wife, husband, hear what your child, or wife

or husband has done; and hear it, too, all men and Angels! Oh, how you will then, for very shame, call upon the mountains and hills to cover you, but in vain!

St. Paul says to all sinners: "What fruit, therefore, had you then in those things, of which you are now ashamed?" (Rom. 6: 21). Let me vary the question to those penitents who conceal their sins in the Sacrament of Penance. What advantage do you derive from those sins that you were ashamed to confess? If you think of confessing them at some future time, then you cannot but see that your shame will be all the greater. Consider the matter, then according to common sense; see how foolishly you have acted, and make up your mind to follow the advice of the Wise Man: "Be not ashamed to confess thy sins" (Ecclus. 4: 31), and to confess them all honestly and candidly. And that the devil may not increase your fear and shame while you are in the confessional, do as David did when he went against the Philistines in his shepherd's dress. He first of all overcame and slew the giant Goliath, and when the Philistines saw their champion conquered, they took to flight. Confess, first of all, the sin you are most ashamed of, and then you will have little difficulty in confessing the others. If you cannot summon up courage enough to tell it to your ordinary confessor, who (you fancy) has a good opinion of you, then there are confessors enough; choose any one you please; for in such circumstances, it is better to change, for once, than to make a bad confession. If you have a sin on your conscience for the last ten, twenty, fifty years, be not ashamed on that account; the priest will receive you with the greatest kindness, mildness, and charity; and he will rejoice at having the opportunity of freeing your soul from its miserable state, and winning it back to God. Perhaps, you imagine that it will be impossible for you to remember all the sins you have committed in so many years. Take courage; the priest will help you, and you will be able to make your confession without difficulty.

Fly for refuge to Jesus Christ, humbly praying him to strengthen your heart by the precious Blood he has shed for you,

and by the powerful help of his grace, you shall conquer your fear and shame. From the wounds of Jesus, flows a virtue enabling us to candidly reveal our most shameful sins in confession. Amen.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

FREQUENT CONFESSION THE MEANS OF FINAL PERSEVERANCE.

"Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it."
Luke 2:8.

To hear willingly and constantly the word of God in sermons is a good thing, necessary for many, useful to all, and it is one of the surest signs of predestination to the kingdom of heaven. Yet, to be satisfied with merely hearing the word of God without endeavoring to practise the truths it teaches, only increases one's responsibility to the divine justice. Blessed are they not only who hear the word of God but also who keep it, says the Gospel; and there is another point to be considered by those who, after diligent preparation have laid aside their sins in confession; that is how they are to avoid future relapses,and continue in the grace of God. Only one means will I suggest which can best help us to this end. And I shall now proceed to show:

I. That the means of avoiding sin and persevering in good is frequent and contrite confession; and

II. That he who loves his soul and its salvation will often have recourse to the Sacrament of Penance.

I. A room that is seldom swept is naturally full of dust and cobwebs. So with a man's conscience. We are naturally so frail and inclined to evil, and so surrounded with temptations and dan-

gerous occasions, that we cannot long keep ourselves free from faults and sins. Even the just man falls seven times. How, then, will it be with the sinner—with him who through the loss of sanctifying grace, lacks special helps from God. "I passed by the field of the slothful man, and by the vineyard of the foolish man: and behold, it was all filled with nettles, and thorns had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall was broken down" (Prov. 24 : 30, 31). What else is the reason why many, after having made a good confession, so soon relapse into their old sins, if not because they seldom approach the holy tribunal? Considering those words of our Lord in the Gospel, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest; and not finding, he saith: I will return into my house whence I came out" (Luke 11 : 24); I ask: Can the evil spirit, then, re-enter a soul that has been cleansed and purified in the Sacrament of Penance?— Certainly, and that, too, because it has been cleansed but once; for if one is satisfied with that, and does not frequently purify his conscience, it will not be long before it will again be sullied, and the evil spirit, having once been enabled to enter it, will take up his abode there and dwell in it as in his own house. Hence the conscience must often be cleansed, if it is to be kept free from stain for a long time.

It is an almost impossible thing for one who goes frequently and with proper dispositions to confession, to lead a bad life. For, on the one hand, the oft-repeated, diligent examen of conscience; the frequent acts of contrition for sin; the firm purpose, so constantly re-iterated, never to sin again; and, on the other hand, the frequent reception and increase of sanctifying and other special and strengthening graces of God make it, humanly speaking, a half impossibility for such a man to be addicted to grievous sin.

And even if such a man does fall into mortal sin through frailty or surprise, sin cannot dwell long in his soul; for his next confession will banish it. True, his conscience has been sullied;

but his good will is there, at once, with its broom to sweep out the filth. He has, indeed, fallen grievously; but he soon rises again by a good confession, and stands firmly on his feet. It is with him as with the workman, who gets a thorn or a splinter into his finger while at work. He, at once, lays aside what he is doing, and does not rest until he has forced out the thorn or splinter, so as to leave it no time to fester in the wound. "When he shall fall," says David of the just and pious, "he shall not be bruised; for the Lord putteth his hand under him" (Ps. 36 : 24). What? He shall not be bruised? Does not mortal sin then inflict a severe injury on the soul? Yes; but there is a great difference between the sin of a just man who goes frequently to confession, and that of a confirmed sinner who seldom receives the Sacraments.

There is a hidden meaning in those words of St. Paul, regarding the sin of Adam. "By one man," he says, "sin entered into this world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men" (Rom. 5 : 12). Speaking of the world, he says that death and sin entered into it. But speaking of men, he says that death passed upon them all. Why so? Does not the world mean the men who are in it? Have not all men, with the exception of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, really sinned in Adam? Why, then, does the Apostle distinguish between the world and men? By the world, the Apostle understands the vain children of the world, who live according to the world and its perverse maxims and usages; but by men, he understands those souls who immediately after a fall enter into themselves, and endeavor in the main to lead pious lives. Into those, then, who are called the world, that is, worldly people, tepid, inconstant men, sin enters, when they commit it, for they remain a long time in the state of sin; but in the case of the others, who do not live according to the world, and try to lead pious lives, sin merely passes upon them, when they commit it, that is, they are, indeed, in the state of sin, but they free themselves from it at once by doing penance immediately. Sin in the just and pious, like a traveler in an

inn, rests but for a short time ; but in the wicked, it takes up its permanent abode.

Hence, the latter are properly called *sinners* ; a hateful name, which they who go often to confession do not even deserve, although they sometimes fall through weakness and frailty. He who rises at once by penance, does not lose the name of a just man. If a man loses some money at play, but at once wins it back again, he cannot be called a loser. A general who flies with his troops from the field of battle, but soon collects the fugitives, and, rushing on the foe with renewed courage, puts them completely to flight, cannot be said to have lost the day. He has rather gained it; he has conquered the enemy.

What great harm then can the crafty demon do to one who goes frequently to confession? In the soul of such a person he does not find a permanent dwelling. In the abodes of thrifty housewives, you will not often find cobwebs ; the spiders and their webs, being constantly banished by the busy brooms. Swallows do not frequent a house in which their nests are in danger of being disturbed. In the same way the devil has no hopes of building his nest or of spinning his poisonous webs, in a soul from which he knows he will be soon driven out. So that, if the tempter of souls sees a man going often to confession, and disclosing with sorrow of heart the sin he has committed and the temptations that assail him, oh, then he well knows that his efforts are sure to be frustrated, and, despairing of success, he is forced to beat a retreat.

But, not only does frequent confession cleanse the soul from the stain of sin and hinder the attacks of the devil ; it also destroys gradually and securely the vestiges and evil effects of former sins, or their temporal punishment. It is of the greatest help; for, although every penitential work and pious practice that one performs in the state of grace is partly available in the way of satisfaction for our sins, yet this satisfying power is specially attached by our Lord to the Sacrament of Penance. In it, besides the acts that are made of the most perfect virtues, faith, hope,

charity, and sorrow for sin, which constitute the preparation for it, the penance imposed by the priest, small though it be, is (not on account of the work or prayer of which it consists, but through the virtues of the Sacrament), united with the infinite merits of Jesus Christ and offered to our heavenly Father to pay the debt contracted by our sins. Hence, one *Our Father*, imposed by way of penance by the priest in confession, has far more efficacy in atoning for sin and blotting out its temporary punishment, than a whole rosary said merely out of private devotion.

And what else can follow from the frequent confessions and pious life of a man who is really anxious to save his soul, but perseverance in good, and a happy death? As a man lives, so will he die. This is a saying that is generally verified. A husbandman, who seldom ventures on the water, can have a well-grounded hope that he will die on land; while the sailor, who rarely sets foot on shore,may make up his mind that he will die at sea. So,too, with those who only go to confession once or twice a year. They spend the most of their time on the stormy sea of sin; and we might say of them with that friend of Job: "Their soul shall die in a storm" (Tob. 36: 14). Having put off for a long time the settlement of their accounts with God, and having allowed them to fall into disorder, in disorder, they will find them at the last moment of their lives, when they will hardly have time to examine and arrange them.

II. Happy are those Christians, who often go to confession with due preparation, and live, as it were, on dry land, safe in the sweet peace of their consciences! Of them, our Saviour says, "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: Amen I say to you that he will gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and passing, will minister unto them" (Luke 12: 37). You are watching now; you are continually occupied with the purification of your souls; and when death comes, your Lord will meet you and invite you to his banquet. "If we would judge ourselves,"says St.Paul to the Corinthians:"we should not be judged" (1Cor. 11: 31).

Happy, then, I say again, are you who keep yourselves away from many sins by frequent confession, and persevere zealously in the service of God! Be of good heart, and never let anything interfere with that holy and most advantageous habit of yours! The Roman Catechism says, "there is nothing the faithful should deem of greater importance, than to cleanse their souls by frequently confessing their sins." We know by unhappy experience that we sully our souls by daily and almost hourly faults and failings. Why, then, should we not cleanse them by the frequent use of such an easy means as the holy Sacrament of Penance, unless we wish to be buried in the filth of our sins? What care and trouble do not fastidious worldlings,and especially delicate ladies, take to preserve a clean exterior, so as to please the eyes of some mere mortal? Why should we not take the same care to keep our immortal souls free from the filth of sin,so as to please God,who is worthy of infinite love? We all wash face and hands every day. And if they are dirtied ten times a day, ten times a day, we wash them again. Are our immortal souls of less importance to us than our perishable bodies? Christians,go often to confession,and make frequent use of that salutary means, if you are really desirous to remain free from sin in the future, and to persevere in good. Consider the end for which we are in this world. It is no other than to serve our great God alone,to tend to the business of our souls, and to live in constant penance, that we may rejoice forever in heaven after death.

"Go often to confession?" many will exclaim. "Must I, then, often submit to that fearful torture? Is it not torment enough for me to be compelled by the commandment of the Church to go once a year? I find it so hard to go every three months, that I tremble all over when I think of it. What would it be if I had all that trouble and anxiety to endure several times in the month?" My good friend, your objection has no force. Do you not know why the confession of your sins appears difficult to you? *Because you go so seldom to confession.* Everything is difficult that practice has not made easy. A musician who does not play of-

ten upon his instrument,finds his fingers stiff and awkward. A mechanic who does not use his tools every day, but allows them to rust, finds it hard to work with them. If you go but once or twice a year to confession, you must necessarily find it a difficult and troublesome task. Everything that is required for this holy Sacrament becomes harder to fulfil the longer it is deferred. Examen of conscience becomes harder,because you have to recall the sins committed during a longer interval. Contrition becomes more difficult, as well as the firm purpose of amendment, on account of the permanent influence of bad habits. Confession of one's sins becomes more difficult,because it takes longer to declare the number of sins committed during a year than during a week or a month. Now, all these difficulties disappear when you go frequently to confession. If a man confesses his sins every week, or at least every fortnight, what great difficulty can he find in it, unless, indeed, he makes difficulties for himself through unfounded anxiety? His examen of conscience is easy, because he has only a short time to go through ; contrition is easy, because he is well practised in making acts of sorrow for sin; it is easy for him to tell his sins, because he has (generally speaking), nothing to confess but small faults and daily imperfections, or else he has to repeat some sin of his past life.

But what is the use of going so often, you ask? I will have nothing to confess. What? "Nothing to confess?" Alas! you will find enough matter for sorrow and confession, if you only examine your conscience as you ought! Your very objection shows that you are not very watchful over your actions, or else that you think little of venial sins, since your conscience is only sensitive to mortal sin, and is like a worn-out horse, that cannot feel a blow, and is insensible to anything but the spur. Shall I tell you the real reason why you do not go frequently to confession? It is because you have not a sincere desire to lead a pious life, to please God, to enrich your soul with merits. Your idea is to live according to the vain world, and neither to mortify your sensuality and evil in-

clinations, nor to amend your vicious ways. That is the whole reason.

Let each one of you make a firm resolve before God, saying in his heart: Now I will earnestly begin, and will continue during my life to go to confession at least every month, so that by thus constantly cleansing my conscience I may be preserved from sin, may become more zealous in the service of God, increase daily in virtue and sanctifying grace, and persevere therein till death. Amen.

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